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CHRISTIANITY

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ARGUMENT;

AND THE

TRUE PRINCIPLE

OF

GOSPEL-EVIDENCE

ASSIGNED:

In a LETTER to a young Gentleman at *Oxford*.

PSAL. CXVI. 10. *I believed, and therefore spake.*
Ut vinum Ægrotis, quia prodeſt raro, nocet ſæpiſſime, melius eſt non adhibere omnino quam ſpe *dubiæ ſalutis* in apertam perniciem incurrere: Sic haud ſcio an melius fuerit Humano Generi motum iſtum celerem cogitationis—quem rationem vocamus, quoniam *peſtifera* ſit multis, admodum paucis *ſalutaris*, non dari omnino, quam tam munificè & tam largè dari.
Cicero de Natur. Deor.

The THIRD EDITION.

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CHRISTIANITY

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ARGUMENT, &c.

SIR,

I Little imagined I ſhould ever have found Cauſe of Regret from any Converſation with you. On every Subject that occurred to our Conſideration you acquitted yourſelf always, as I thought, ſo judiciouſly, and ſo greatly to my Satisfaction, as made me promiſe myſelf the moſt comfortable Enjoyment of your growing Genius. But theſe flattering Preſages have been much check'd of late, and receiv'd a very melancholy Alloy from the Subject of our laſt Meeting: The Subject of the World where it is the moſt material to *think right*, where it is indeed of the moſt tremendous Conſequence to be miſtaken. What are all your ingenious Diſcoveries of ſpeculative Truths, which at beſt ſerve but to entertain and amuſe the Imagination, if, in the main Point, in the *one Eſſential Truth* you are ſtill to ſeek? There only it is that Ignorance and Error are fatal, and Knowledge truly of Importance. And had you beſides erred in any Branch of human Science, your penetrating Reaſon would, in all Probability, have recovered and ſet you right again; but here, be aſſured, it

will have no ſuch effect, as proudly as you inſiſt upon its admired All-ſufficiency. For you told me, (your Words made too ſad an Impreſſion for me eaſily to forget them) That " your own " Reaſon was the only Guide you could de- " pend upon to come at the Knowledge of every " Thing your Maker deſign'd you ſhould know ; " that they, who pretended to vote this Principle " unſecure, reflected highly on the Wiſdom and " Equity of its Author; that, for your own Part, " you had not that impious Notion of the Su- " preme Being, to diſtruſt the Conſequence of " your ſincere Endeavours to pleaſe him, or to " imagine, that you might innocently tamper " with your Reaſon to the Prejudice of your " eternal Happineſs ; that *if our own Hearts did* " *not condemn us, we muſt needs have a juſt Con-* " *fidence towards God* ; ——— that a Man could " evidently never be jealous enough of Opinions " contracted by Education, and made ſacred by " Habit ; that he could never be too induſtrious " in improving his Suſpicions of Things his own " Reaſon had no Share in introducing ; accord- " ingly, that to ſhake Hands fairly with all we " had been taught, was the firſt Step to be ta- " ken if ever we meant to be fixed on any Ra- " tional Perſuaſion, ſince every one's Tutor " could not be in the right ; and there was no " Mark of Diſtinction poſſibly to be found with- " out taking Matters into our own Hands, begin- " ning Things entirely again, and boldly ſetting " up for ourſelves." —— A Romantick Sally of Youth, and Flouriſh of Philoſophy ! or in the ſacred Phraſe, *Profane and Vain Babbling !*

Seeker's vain Pretenſions.

It is but too eaſy, my Friend, to ſee your Meaning, when you triumph thus in an entire Releaſe from the Prejudices of Education ; this has been the common plauſible Style of the more

modeſt

modeſt Profeſſors of Infidelity through all Ages, and is a Language generally well underſtood. If this therefore be the Card you deſign to ſteer by, you muſt not depend too certainly upon the Aſſiſtance of Faith to conduct you, or making Heaven your aſſured Port.

If once you allow yourſelf in Doubting, I will take upon me to anſwer for the Conſequence, that you never will well believe; if once you come fairly to your propoſed Situation for *proving all Things*, be aſſured, that you will never *hold faſt* any Thing. To offer to ſit down to examine, ſeems to me to be abſolutely giving up the Cauſe of Religion, and deſiring me to diſpute, to be begging the Queſtion. For, is it not moſt abſurd to require a Belief, if previous Examination be requiſite? If Scepticiſm be this neceſſary Qualification for the obtaining of a true Faith, how can we ever be ſecure that it ſhall not improve into direct Unbelief? If Doubting be at all admitted, Conviction can never, ſure, with any Propriety, be inſiſted on. Conviction is a dubious and uncertain Conſequence wherever there is Ground for Debate, and therefore not to be promiſed for, any more than any other Contingency. If I am once left free to examine, I can by no means be tied up in the Iſſue. It is in its own Nature a neceſſary and independent Event, under no Influence of mine, where I have no Power to interpoſe to direct its Courſe or Operations, or any farther Intereſt or Concern, than merely as a Looker-on.

Diſputes, if allowable, no enſuring Conviction.

Forgive the Freedom of my Zeal, when I tell you plainly, that *you know not what manner of Spirit you are of.* There is no Medium betwixt believing and not believing. If, as I apprehend you, you do indeed intend to wave all Religion 'till your Reaſon is ſatisfied about it,

All Suspence of Faith Apostacy in one baptized.

know, that from the very Moment of that Resolution, so long you actually apostatize from Christianity, and renounce your Baptismal-Vow. A strange Method this! to turn one's Back upon Religion in order to meet it, to discard it as a means to commence Acquaintance. Alas! Sir, to have your Mind thus *in Equilibrio* is rank Infidelity. Our Saviour has expresly assured us, that he looks upon a Seeker as Anti-christ professt, and that *he that is not with him, is against him.*

By this Time your Philosophical Zeal is alarmed, and you are earnest to interrupt me with a thousand plausible Queries to stop my Career. You have another pompous Lecture, no doubt, ready prepared upon the Occasion to enforce your first Sentiment, to insist strenuously still upon the Justice of your Examining-Scheme, and the Necessity of coming indifferent to a fair Trial. Be patient, however, for one Moment, and it is possible I may give you all the Satisfaction you can desire in that Article, without any of your Interposition; 'tis possible I may anticipate the Substance of the very Argument you propose, and become myself your unexpected Advocate on the Point. For never believe but I am convinced, as well as you, that Opinions founded on Prejudice and Ignorance, are not that Truth which the Gospel requires at our Hands; that the Tales of our Nurses (to use your own Stile) are by no means that Kind of *Knowledge wherein standeth eternal Life.* Is it yet farther evident to me, that where Reason is to determine the Cause, she must be left to herself to determine fairly; that it is the greatest Injustice and Mockery to invite her to give Sentence, where there have been Practices before-hand, and are Practices still continued to obstruct or limit her Influence. Thus far it seems then I readily agree with you

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in all your Preliminaries in behalf of Reaſon and her Rights, but you will defer building too much upon the Conceſſion, 'till you hear the Ground I profeſs for this Agreement; which is, my looking upon the Subject before us to be abſolutely out of her Juriſdiction. I am fully perſuaded, that the judging at all of religious Matters is not the proper Province of Reaſon, or indeed an Affair where ſhe has any Concern. This is the great Point in which at preſent we differ, and wherein I would, if poſſible, obtain your Concurrence. Your boaſted *rational Faith* is what I would fain ſhew you to be a falſe, unwarranted Notion of your own, and without the leaſt Ground to ſupport it, either in Nature or Revelation. I mean, that your Aſſent to Revealed Truths ſhould be founded upon the Conviction of your Underſtanding. That Work once happily effected, and the Way, if it may be, well cleared in your Mind by the Detection of its miſtaken Principles, I ſhould make it my next earneſt Buſineſs, as due, to endeavour the ſupplying of the Deficiency, and providing you ſome better Account of the Matter, ſome fitter and more effectual Principle of ſaving Knowledge in its Stead. For the attaining of which Purpoſe, I can think of no readier Method, than by attempting to ſhew you,

Reaſon cannot be the Principle of Faith.

Firſt, That Reaſon, or the intellectual Faculty, could not poſſibly, both from its own Nature and that of Religion, be the Principle intended by God to lead us into a true Faith.

Secondly, That neither is it ſo in Fact from the plain Account given us of it in Holy Scripture.

And, *Thirdly*, By tracing plainly from the ſame indiſputable Authority what it poſitively is, and by aſcertaining the proper and preſcribed

Means to come at the Knowledge of Divine Truths.

Becauſe required to think all alike.

In the firſt Place, then, Can it be by the Exerciſe of their Reaſon that Men can be required to *think all alike?* The youngeſt Pupil of Philoſophy would ſtart at the Propoſition, and therefore I ſhould not on any other Occaſion offer to propoſe ſuch a Queſtion to you. You underſtand too well what the Principle of Reaſon is to expect any ſuch Conſequence from it; nay, not to be certain of its producing a direct contrary Effect. A Thinker of a much lower Degree of Proficiency would diſdain, very juſtly, to beſtow a ſecond Thought upon ſo prepoſterous a Scheme, as that of Unity in Opinion propoſed to be effected by Reaſoning. He ſees readily at firſt View, that the different Light Things appear in to different Men, muſt neceſſarily create a different Senſe of Things; that an Infinity of *Sects* (as they are called) is but the natural and unavoidable Conſequence of every Man's thinking for himſelf; that from the very Notion of ſpeculative Enquiry, and the immenſe Variety of human Underſtandings, Private Judgments muſt of courſe run into the greateſt Latitude.

Threatned into Conſequences preſcribed.

In the next Place, with what Regard, with what Patience rather, can one of this Claſs be ſuppoſed to attend to Queſtions propounded to him, *under the Reſtraints of Threats and Authority*, to be talked to of Danger in his Deciſions, and have the Rod held out with the Leſſon, to have Propoſitions tendered to his Reaſon with Penalties annexed? His Reaſon, ever neceſſitated to determine juſt as ſhe does of herſelf, and by her Nature incapable either of paying Compliments, or giving Offence. He is conſcious all the while that he has no ſuch free Vote to diſpoſe of, and therefore diſdains, with all Juſtice, an Attempt

tempt equally weak and unjuſt, of frightning him into a Compliance out of his Power.

Theſe would be all ſo many groſs and palpable Abſurdities upon the Face of ſuch a Commiſſion, I ſay, if Application were intended to be made by it to the Underſtanding. For that it is not I ſhall endeavour yet farther to evince by looking a little into Life and Practice upon the Occaſion, by tracing this Faith to it's known Original, and pointing directly to the great Root whence all our religious Impreſſions notoriouſly ſpring. By aſking you farther, ——— *Can a Man be baptized into a rational Religion?* Where is Reaſon concerned when Babes accept the Terms of Salvation by Deputy, and are entitled to all the Privileges of the moſt extenſive Faith by another's Act? By the Baptiſmal Ceremony, they commence true Believers at once, and are made Heirs of Heaven, you know, by the Faith of their Bondſmen, whilſt as yet they have not the leaſt Share or Symptom of Underſtanding themſelves, and may in all Poſſibility never live to attain one; and which, if they had at the Time, I know not yet how they could well give a rational Aſſent by Proxy. Yet ſuch is the Pleaſure and Ordinance of God himſelf in this Point. And would he, is it probable, have ever laid a Foundation of Belief for us, and at the ſame time have made it our Duty to ſubvert it? For the very firſt Leſſon of Philoſophy, the firſt Step towards the Uſe of our Reaſon, is to explode (as you contend, and very deſervedly) under the Name of Prejudice, all the Effect of our Education, which it is now, on the contrary, the Command of our holy Religion, that we ſhould induſtriouſly cultivate and improve; cultivate, in a Method conformable exactly to that of its implanting, by Application to Heaven, and not to the Schools; by the Uſe

Ordered to be baptized into it.

of

of Prayer, not of Reaſon. A freſh Inſtance from the manner of its Culture, that Reaſon was to have originally no Share in making the Graft, *To pray for it.* *We are to pray for Encreaſe of our Faith.* ——— Had we been expected to have contributed to its Eſtabliſhment by any Endeavours or Pains of our own, we might have had Cauſe to ſuſpect yet farther, that the Ground-word too was to be ſomething wherein we were to be ourſelves Acceſſaries. But if *Prayer* be the effectual Means propoſed for the attaining the Perfection of our Faith, there is a ſtrong Preſumption too that our Labours of every other Kind were to be ſpared throughout the whole Progreſs; and that it was to be introduced after a like manner by Methods *purely Divine*, and without any of our Aſſiſtance. That we are to addreſs ourſelves to Heaven to inculcate the full Complement of our Belief, will help us to a juſt and uniform Account of its whole Nature, whilſt it points readily back to its Source of Baptiſm; our being to look upwards for the Completion of the Bleſſing, muſt ſerve ſufficiently to aſcertain its Original, and convince us, that its firſt Seeds can be of no human Extraction. For is it poſſible that we can conceive how *Reaſon* can ever found ſuch a Faith as *Grace* can ſecond or add to? *Encreaſe of Evidence* is the only Acceſſion to be made to rational Perſuaſion. What a conſiſtent Prayer! "Give us, O Lord, *from Heaven*, by thy particular Aſſiſtance, a larger Degree of that Faith, "which we have already attained in part from the "*natural and ordinary Means* of Conviction, and "the Conſideration of the Evidence.

It is impoſſible, ſurely, when we conſider to whom we muſt aſcribe them, that any ſuch abſurd Schemes can any longer be ſuppoſed, that we can ever imagine, that the great *Author and Finiſher*

Finiſher of our Faith ſhould have contrived us an irrational one, to be afterwards ſuperſeded, or even confirmed by a rational one.

In what Light muſt a Rationaliſt again regard all Application by *Prayer* for the confirming and continuing us *ſtedfaſt in the Faith*, and the diſavowing, in the Fulneſs of our Conviction, all future Uſe of Reaſon for our Security? What is all this Practice in your Senſe, but plainly the wilfully ſoliciting our favourite Prejudices? What is all this meritorious Perſeverance which we ſo earneſtly affect, but *a blind and fooliſh Obſtinacy to a preſent Notion*, if we have no better an Authority than that of our own Reaſon to fix us? And, in Fact, ſo ſtrictly is this irrevocable Conſtancy in our Profeſſion, this utter Deafneſs to all farther Solicitation for Diſcipleſhip, required of all Chriſtians, that we are warned, though even *an Angel from Heaven* were to preach any *new* Doctrine to us, to give not the leaſt Heed or Credit to his Pretenſions. And yet what is there in the utmoſt of Reaſon's Aſſurances to falſify or confront ſuch a Preacher? What is there that the Nature of any external Evidence can poſſibly afford us, that has not more than a Balance in ſuch an Authority? Had God indeed deſign'd that Reaſon ſhould be at all employed upon theſe Occaſions, he would never, we may depend on it, have thus enjoin'd Things which he knew muſt abſolutely deſtroy the Effect of it. If the Aſſent he required were to be a rational one, it would be highly wicked and unjuſt to prepoſſeſs Mens tender Minds in any Manner before they came to the full Uſe of their rational Faculties. But now that we are actually commanded with early Diligence to retain our Children as ſo many ſure Votaries to the Cauſe we profeſs ourſelves, it is plain that a rational Aſſent is by no Means calculated for, or expected

To be taught it in our Childhood.

pected at our Hands. For, ſure, you will never ſay a Man has ſtill the Uſe of his Reaſon improving upon him to aſſiſt him afterwards in the ratifying or reverſing of his Parents Inſtructions as he ſhall judge fit, when thoſe very Inſtructions have all along taken Care (or elſe they have been doing nothing) to repreſent all future Diſcoveries and Alterations as ſomething beyond Meaſure heinous and deteſtable. And what a perverſe Apoſtate would he in Fact be looked upon, who, upon Notice from his Sureties of the Conditions they had engaged him in, ſhould ever think of appealing, or making any farther Search for *the Certainty of that Knowledge in which he had been inſtructed*, and poſitively refuſe to ſtand to what they had done in his Name, till they had laid the *Grounds and Reaſons* of their Proceedings before him to his Satisfaction? And yet there is not certainly, as you ſay, one ſingle Argument from Reaſon why a Man ſhould not return of courſe to Neutrality the firſt Moment he begins to think for himſelf. Neutrality! a Term ever of the juſteſt Horror and Deteſtation in the Ears of the true Believer, in whoſe Account all Suſpence and Queſtioning upon the Subject amount to a peremptory and impious Denial. And yet nothing is more evident in itſelf, or more readily by all allowed than what you aſſert, that no Party is qualified to be a Judge, and that to examine fairly, we muſt come unprejudiced and indifferent to the Examination. Examination, in the very Term implies a Suſpence of Conviction; and therefore if Religion admits at all of Examination, it muſt neceſſarily admit likewiſe of (at leaſt a temporary) Diſbelief. The rational Chriſtian, whoever he be, muſt of courſe have originally ſet out a Sceptic, and heſitated for a Time, even whether that Goſpel were true or falſe. Tell me

Examining allows Doubting.

me then, I beſeech you, you that contend ſo earneſtly for a rational Belief, ſince the firſt Motions of Doubt are, it ſeems, but neceſſary Preparatives in your Scheme, and therefore not in themſelves criminal, by what Authority (if the Evidence happens never to take the Effect) can a Man *be obliged ever to be reſolved?* If a Man may, nay muſt, diſbelieve a while for Information's ſake, why may he not even diſbelieve for ever on for want of due Information? If Doubting be indeed one Moment allowable, who ſhall ascertain the preciſe Time for ſumming up the Evidence, and pronouncing Sentence? Who ſhall take upon him to ſettle the laſt lawful Point of Heſitation, making the proper Indulgence to the tardy Apprehenſion, and exacting a more ready Deciſion from the more capable? For all this reaſonable Allotment of Time in Proportion to their ſeveral Abilities, Men muſt innocently take who are to *work out their Salvation* by the Uſe of their Reaſon: They muſt be permitted to acquaint themſelves fully and perfectly with the Merits of the Cauſe, before they can be expected to form maturely, and give in their important Determinations upon it; and the more fair and ſevere the Scrutiny, the more Time it muſt neceſſarily coſt them: The very Integrity of the Examiner will be the natural Impediment to his Diſpatch.

Settling of Doubts precarious, and likely to take up too much Time.

Now if this be the Caſe, that a Man muſt *go thus long without* his religious Determinations, it will, I think, be ſomething very difficult to prove them neceſſary at all; ſince 'tis probable, *they may now come too late to anſwer the End* for which they were deſigned. For let us aſk our ſelves, What is the propoſed Uſe and Purpoſe of this Faith required? Is it not *to influence our Actions, and direct our Conduct through Life?* And when have

Rational Faith may not come Time enough to regulate our Practice.

have we more Occaſion for ſuch a Monitor than at the Criſis when our Paſſions are moſt prevalent, in thoſe early Years when Reaſon is leaſt able to form her Judgments in our Aſſiſtance? The Uſe of Faith is to enable us *to overcome the World.* But what ſhall become of this promiſed Victory, if the Conteſt muſt be ſo long depending; and if we muſt be ſo long taken up with *fitting on our Armour?* Mean time the Powers of Darkneſs, and our own Corrupt Diſpoſitions, will be fatally gaining Ground upon us every Day, long before this boaſted Ally can have raiſed her Forces to come in to our Protection, or be qualified in any Degree to deal with them. Our Paſſions will be beforehand with our Reaſon, in ſpite of all her Pretenſions. The Habits of Vice will be taking deep Root the while, let her Preparations be never ſo expeditious, or her Motions never ſo watchful to oppoſe them; they muſt needs have got the Start in their Advances, before ſhe can, by her Nature, have made any conſiderable Progreſs in thoſe ſalutary Diſcoveries, which are to regulate or ſubdue them. Now for want of this timely Notice, and the Secret of diſtinguiſhing, we may more than probably have embark'd in wrong Meaſures at ſetting out, and be loſt in the Power of Habit beyond Recovery, before we know where we are. Unprovided of all reſtraining Conſiderations, and at a Loſs for a better Guide, we ſhall, of courſe, give up ourſelves wholly to our natural Biaſs, and the Law of Inclination; and when we have lived the beſt Part of our Lives thus at Adventure, and ſtrayed ſo far without the Leſſons of this ſage Counſellor, they will go near, when they arrive, to find us actually engaged already, and beyond the Power of Precept, to retrieve. For want of the early Intelligence, we may be innocently involved in

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the moſt horrible Degrees of Guilt before we can be better informed; ſo that if we have not the Benefit of theſe Inſtructions *at firſt*, it will be to very little Purpoſe to have them at all. As long as we are *debating the Genuineneſs* of our Rule, we have no Tie upon us to reſpect its Authority, no Inducement to pay it any Degree of Obedience or Conformity in our Practice, till it has gained a ſufficient Eſtabliſhment and Root in our Opinion. Our Actions, if our acquired Faith be to preſcribe to them, can be under no Direction or Reſtraint till the Proceedings of Reaſon have ſettled the Standard for Conſcience, and ſatisfied her what her Obligations are in thoſe Points. Now what a random Conduct this muſt produce with regard to any *ſtanding Principle*, or regular Scheme of Morality, is very evident. Whilſt I am myſelf in Search after juſt Notions of right and wrong, and attempting to learn by ſpeculative Diſcoveries what they are, 'tis not much to be expected that any one elſe ſhall find them in my Conduct. And the Misfortune is, that in our preſent Situation there is no ſtanding ſtill to look about us, even ſo much as to find out the Way. We muſt be running on ourſelves in Life, let our Syſtems proceed never ſo heavily.

But were it poſſible ſtill that our doubting Diſciple ſhould not be in the mean Time at this ſuppoſed Loſs for his Duty on any Occaſion, let his natural Obligations, as he may pretend, be never ſo obvious and ſelf-evident, and his Practice never ſo ſtrictly conformable; what if without this previous Acquiſition and devout Temper I contend for, the beſt of Lives is no Circumſtance to recommend or qualify us for any Regard from the Throne of Grace? *Good Works done before Faith*, and without the eſpecial Influence of this ſanctifying Principle, are ſo far from being accepted

Plain Morality of no Eſteem or Acceptance without the Influence of Faith.

cepted in themſelves as the Terms of a complete Obedience, that they do not ſo much as put Men into a nearer State for Favour, or a Capacity of being the ſooner enlightned; they do not, as our Church expreſſes it, make Men *meet to receive Grace*. The exacteſt Obſerver of moral Laws is a vile and wretched Sinner in God's Account, as long as he proceeds by human Lights and Motives, and upon the Strength of mere Ethicks only. Nay, even his moſt virtuous Actions themſelves are highly criminal and diſpleaſing to God, as long as he continues in ſuch a Diſpoſition of Mind, as they are undoubtedly of a Nature corrupted and unregenerate. For *whatſoever is not of Faith is Sin*. Without ſome particular Acknowledgments firſt made, there is not in all our Endeavours the leaſt room to hope for Acceptance at his Hands. *He that cometh to God, muſt believe that he is*; that he has graciouſly revealed his holy Will to Mankind, and granted them Pardon of Sins by the Mediation of his Son, and muſt act only in Conſequence of ſuch Perſuaſion. The unquiet Eſſays of Reaſoning, curious Diſquiſitions upon his Being and Attributes, and the Truth and Authenticneſs of Revelation, are Practices utterly inconſiſtent with the Pretenſions of all ſuch as *call themſelves Chriſtians*, or expect any Benefit from the Goſpel-Covenant, to which they are always preſumed Parties. We muſt be provided of our Creed before we are warranted to pray ſo much as for Faith itſelf. We muſt not *lift up our Hands to Heaven with doubting*.

If beyond theſe Uſes aſſigned, the Diſcovery of our Rule of Action, or the purifying and ſtamping a Value upon the Fruits of common Morality, there be ſtill farther ſomething abſtractedly of a neceſſary Qualification in a true Faith,

Faith, something of a meritorious Nature in the Thing itself, considered merely as a proper Test of our Obedience.—We must yet, if Reason be the allotted Guide, be obliged to wait at least till that Reason can bring us her Report. Mean time in this infidel Interim should Death surprize us, what shall now become of our Hopes without this necessary Preparative for our Introduction? You will examine, you say.—*Thou Fool! this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee.*—When Death has once overtaken us unfurnished of our Passport, what a kind of Apology to trust to will it be to say (in such express Contradiction to the Provision so peremptorily enjoined us) that we were intending to look into Things; that we were looking out to procure a *Wedding-Garment*, at a Time when we ought to be *ready dressed to attend the Bridegroom*, and actually to make our Appearance in the Habit? And is it now any unwarrantable Conclusion from all these Considerations, to infer, that Religion therefore *can never be a Thing to be taught*, that it must needs be something that *does not require Time to attain*, like other common Lessons and Sciences, which are indifferent in their Consequences? Since the very same Reasons that make it *necessary at all*, make it *equally so every Moment of our Lives.*

We may not live long enough to go thro' with such an Enquiry.

A true Faith equally necessary at all Seasons of our Life.

To leave Mankind a disputable Subject to exercise their Judgments upon, and at the same time to require us all, at the Peril of our Souls, to be in the right, — Demonstration itself is not Ground sufficient to exact such an Assent, unless it be self-evident too, and if there be the least of Induction or Inference in the Case. For the Generality of Apprehensions extend not beyond a simple Proposition; and are thrown out at once at the very Mention of introducing a Medium. The Souls of the Multitude are lodged in their

Few Men qualified for Reasoning at all.

Hands, and that for the wiſeſt Purpoſes. They are formed entirely with a View to active Life, wherein the true Intereſts of Society are much more effectually conſulted, than in their being calculated for making the moſt ingenious Diſcuſſions in the unfruitful Province of Argument and Speculation. And what an injurious Repreſentation, what an arbitrary Image is this then of our wiſe and good Creator! requiring a juſt Judgment of Things, and not giving Abilities to judge at all; making Salvation a Matter of blind Chance and Gueſs-work, and ſetting our precious Souls upon the Hazard of a random Conjecture; and all this too, where the determining either right or wrong muſt in itſelf be equally meritorious. For the Nature of the Evidence of Religion, in your rational Way, being founded entirely on the Credit and Authenticneſs of Hiſtory, a very critical Point to pronounce upon it is impoſſible, without a good natural Turn for Reaſoning, and even ſome very conſiderable Acquiſitions of Learning ſuperadded, to give any rational Deciſion at all in the Caſe. Whereas how few are there, I ſay, that Nature has endowed with theſe proper Talents; and how much fewer whom their Education has adapted for any ſuch Taſk? A Conſideration that has often excited my Wonder, to ſee Mr. *Addiſon*, in behalf of Religion, inſiſting ſo ſtrenuouſly upon the Force of it's external Proofs, and the Authenticneſs of Facts, evincing, as he certainly does, beyond all Contradiction, the Veracity of the Sacred Writings and Miſſion, as an undoubted and unexceptionable Claim to univerſal Diſcipleſhip. Whereas in my humble Senſe, *the Truth of the Hiſtory itſelf* is by no means the Matter in Queſtion, but *my Obligation to aſſent to it.* It is one thing whether a Propoſition be indeed true in itſelf, and another

The Reaſonableneſs therefore of religion in Speculation nothing to the Purpoſe.

another whether a Man be bound to apprehend and believe it. A Diſtinction, I cannot but think, not ſufficiently attended to on this Subject. For that abſolute and certain Truth of the Goſpel, which ſhines out indeed ſo conſpicuouſly upon a proper Diſcuſſion and Acquaintance, does yet not at all hinder, but that it may very poſſibly *appear otherwiſe* to the rude and ſhort-ſighted Underſtandings of many, that cannot enter ſufficiently into the Argument to become apprized of its Merits. It is ſtill a ſpeculative Truth, whoſe Explanation and whole Force depends upon a juſt Apprehenſion of moral Proofs, and is to be learnt only by Reaſoning; and therefore muſt from its Nature be liable to be often *miſconceived*, and have its Opponents, ſo far neceſſitated, and therefore innocent, in their Oppoſition, without ſome farther Cauſe and Principle of Offence to juſtify their being damned for miſtaking. Demonſtrative, doubtleſs, it is; but what is that to me, who have not the Talents requiſite for entering into Demonſtrations? It is by no means ſufficient that your Argument be indeed *concluſive in itſelf*, unleſs you can adapt it effectually to my Underſtanding too, and make it *concluſive to me*. It muſt be upon ſuch a Connexion only that all my Duty in the Caſe can poſſibly be grounded. For in what Relation can any thing ſtand to me, of which I have no Perception? Your Muſick may poſſibly be juſt in its Kind to the moſt critical Exactneſs, but as long as I am naturally *deaf or untuned to the Voice of the Charmer, charm he never ſo wiſely* and expertly, it is impoſſible for you to expect that I ſhould ever pronounce from my own Knowledge that he does ſo, or expreſs any Marks of my Approbation or Applauſe upon the Occaſion. It muſt be one that hath *Ears to hear*, and be properly affected by it; one, who

by having cultivated a Taſte for Harmony and Concords, is become *able to receive it*, that muſt give it its due Teſtimony. For me, under my unluckly *Impediment*, it can be no Affront to the Juſtneſs of the Compoſition, or any juſt Ground of Offence to the Performer, that I have really nothing to ſay to it. That the Hiſtorical Facts of the Goſpel are moſt highly credible and convincing to ſuch as have the Capacity to look into them, we both readily agree; but to ſuch as have not, I aſſert that they are properly neither true nor falſe; they are not chargeable with any Verdict about them, one way or the other. The Reaſoners on the other Side ſay, "This is true, and "therefore all Men muſt believe it." I ſay, "it is "true, but all Men cannot believe it, or frame any "reaſonable Notion about it." The Difference betwixt us is evidently not the Truth of Chriſtianity; that main Point we both unanimouſly allow: The Connexion and Juſtice of the Inference, that becauſe it is true, therefore all Men are bound to believe it, is the Circumſtance I ſo juſtly except againſt.

For the ſame Reaſon, all the ingenious Applications of myſterious Prophecies, and their References, are in my Opinion never to be mentioned as Arguments and Means of Conviction, in behalf of a Truth *deſtined to be univerſally received*. The learned and profound Calculation of *Daniel*'s *Weeks*, if religious Faith were a Matter of mere Speculation, would go far to tempt me perhaps into a favourable Opinion of the Criticiſm and Juſtneſs of the Conjecture. The excellent *Analogy of Reaſon and Revelation*, lately communicated, might induce me yet more powerfully to acknowledge at leaſt a very great and ſpecious Appearance of Truth in its traced Connexions and Inferences, if the Subject were *indifferent*

different in its Conſequences, and I were left to myſelf to pronounce freely what occurred naturally to my Mind from the Conſideration of it. But when I conſider all theſe enlightening Lucubrations as Proofs actually inſiſted on, and whoſe Force I am *bound to admit*, as calculated for the general and ready *Uſe of all* thoſe to whom the Precept of Believing is addreſt; or, in ſhort, as that which any Part of the Evidence of Chriſtianity is to ſtand upon, or depend for its Support; however I may honour the ſagacious Authors of theſe *new Lights* for their particular Diſcoveries, I cannot but draw to myſelf very different Conſequences from thoſe they ſeem to expect from their Propoſal of them. Inſtead of availing to convince my Reaſon of the Truth of any particular religious Syſtem, they have a juſt contrary Effect, and ſuggeſt ſtrongly to me, that ſuch a Poſition can never be *That neceſſary Truth*, which ſtands in need of any ſuch far-fetched Apologies, and *laboured Accounts*, to reconcile and explain it. I conſider all theſe as, in Truth they are, Inventions *of late Date*, and therefore at beſt ſuperfluous towards the main Deſign, ſince Religion muſt needs, to my thinking, have been equally evident, and well-eſtabliſhed, long before ever theſe new Defences were ſo happily thought of. Whenever I reflect with myſelf upon the general Importance and End of Religion, I cannot found its Evidence by any means on any *Complication* of Circumſtances *to be traced out* by Induſtry or Addreſs, for the Illuſtration of its Authority. I cannot but form to myſelf ſome more *ſimple Characteriſtick* of full Sufficiency always accompanying it. I cannot but conclude in my Mind, that the whole Force of its Evidence muſt have been *co-temporary with the original* Inſtitution itſelf, and have been entirely complete

for the Purpoſe ever ſince its firſt Publication; that neceſſary Truths were not revealed by halves, and left to be perfected afterwards at Leiſure by the Efforts of human Wit; that the Evidence of the Goſpel muſt have this one Property of its Great Author to be the *ſame Yeſterday to Day, and for ever*; and conſequently muſt have been equally plain and affecting to ſuch as never lived to be in the Way of theſe *ſupplemental Revelations*, and who never heard a Syllable in their Lives of *Weeks or Analogies*.

There might ſtill be ſome faint Shew of Foundation or Pretence perhaps for our endeavouring to multiply this Kind of improved Hints and ſpeculative Refinements upon the Subject, if the Candidates for Heaven were all Philoſophers and Scholars. But we are to remember always that the Terms of Salvation are equally calculated for the Benefit of ſuch as cannot ſo much as read; as they were chiefly publiſhed to the World by Men actually under that Incapacity themſelves. In Fact, it is notorious that the moſt, and I might add, the beſt, of every religious Profeſſion do never concern themſelves the leaſt in any argumentative Taſks, or would indeed be ever the wiſer for it, if they did. And thoſe few who pretend, or perhaps flatter themſelves that they are indeed *rationally convinced* in the Point, may yet recollect, if they will fairly own the Truth, that they were equally *convinced before* the Trial, or, at leaſt, had ſtrong Preſages beforehand, on which Side the Truth lay, and *intended*, in ſome Meaſure, *to be convinced* at ſetting out.

For granting yet farther every Man living to be naturally as capable as you pleaſe of judging in theſe Points, that in Conſequence of ſuch Capacity, his Reaſon, duly exerted, muſt needs lead him to embrace Chriſtianity, in Preference to all the

the other religious Profeſſions in the World, and to diſtinguiſh ſtill farther our eſtabliſhed Church in particular, as the Mode the moſt conformable to that divine Plan; I aſk ſtill, where is the Man living in the Situation requiſite for the Execution of ſuch an Attempt, and qualified, even upon the Suppoſition, to make the Trial? Prejudice, ever earlier than the Eſſays of Reaſon, is as abſolute a Diſqualification for ſuch a Taſk as the greateſt natural Incapacity. A thouſand ſtrong Impreſſions already ſunk deep into his Mind, a thouſand natural Attachments to Cuſtoms, Perſons and Things, have long e'er this Time put it abſolutely out of his Power to be able to make equitable Deciſions in Caſes where the Intereſts of any of theſe Favourites are concerned. An innocent Partiality contracted for particular Objects, and Notions familiarized to us by long Acquaintance, an honeſt and natural Fondneſs for our old Friends, will never permit us now to exert our Judgments diſintereſtedly, where They may poſſibly be affected by the Event, or diſpoſe us to afford this Exactneſs of fair Play to new Comers. As long as Men are ſubject to the Influence of Paſſions as well as Reaſon, ſuch a calm and Stoical Conduct is not to be expected; or that the Cauſe of the Stranger ſhould have all this rigid Juſtice and ſtrict Regard that looks ſo becoming in Theory, paid to its Pretenſions and Merit, when once the Judge's Affections have been ſo deeply pre-engaged, and have unwarily taken their Part in the Debate.

The ableſt and beſt of Men diſqualified for fair Reaſoning by their natural Prejudices.

Now it is to be remembered all along, and carried carefully with us through all theſe Conſiderations, that the *great Command to believe, is peremptory and abſolute*; no Conditions in the Caſe that we ſhall believe if we have *Time*, if we have

Abilities; or if preceding *Prejudices* have not firſt taken too faſt Hold to prevent us.

Rational Faith, when attain'd, would not anſwer the Ends.

To paſs over all theſe preſumptive Obſtacles in the Way, let us however ſuppoſe, that our rational Enquirer has happily laboured through all Impediments to his Wiſh; that he is crowned with all imaginable Succeſs in his Undertaking, and confirmed at laſt beyond all Remains of Doubt and Scruple in his religious Perſuaſions: Let us conſider him for the preſent as having attain'd to the higheſt Degree of Satisfaction in the Point that Reaſon can poſſibly help him to; will a Faith, thus built upon Syllogiſms, ever furniſh out any of thoſe miraculous Effects, which are deſcribed to attend a juſt and finiſhed Belief? Can this be the Faith whoſe promiſed Influence was to *ſuperſede the Powers of ſecond Cauſes*, and triumph over the whole Courſe of Nature in its Operations? Can this be the Faith whoſe Efficacy was to *remove Mountains*, and make Men *walk upon the Water?* Or will it even ſerve to produce any of thoſe more known and ordinary Characteriſticks that are given us to diſtinguiſh the true Believer? For Inſtance, will ſuch a Faith ever produce that lively and active *Spirit of Zeal* in the Cauſe, which is every where ſo ſtrongly recommended to all Profeſſors of the Goſpel? The calm Votary of Reaſon's Dictates will not ſo readily be brought to expreſs all that ſanguine Concern for his Opinions, which is required of a Diſciple of Chriſt. He will be apt to be very much wanting in that laudable Warmth with which religious Truths are to be aſſerted and promoted. He will never be ſolicitous enough about the Succeſs of his Inferences, or reſent with a becoming Ardour the Contradiction of his Doctrines and Hypotheſes. The glimmering Ray, that

Would prove too cold.

that conducts his Understanding, will never have Strength enough to light up such a potent Fire as that of Zeal; a *Zeal according to Knowledge* will scarce ever deserve the Name. He that has once experienced all the Difficulties and Uncertainties, that attend a Course of Reasoning, will never dare to abet any of his Discoveries with Warmth. He will have seen enough to make him very tender in taking upon him to dictate, or communicate absolute Lessons of Instruction, and nothing to authorize his insisting vehemently, or *contending earnestly*, in Behalf of a Faith wherein he was his own Master; since the best Warrant of human Reason can never give such Assurance of the Truth, but that we *may possibly be mistaken*; and if we may, it is Madness of Partiality to attack another's Principles with Vehemence, as if we were the only Persons not liable to Error. He considers himself not only as not infallible, but frequently not consistent with himself; that he has found, even in himself, very different Sentiments, at different Seasons, upon the same Subject. Or if possibly he has not actually remarked already any Thing of the Kind, can he ever be sure from any Degree of Conviction which he feels at present that the Vibration of his Judgment is entirely over, and fixed inviolably to that one Point? Can he at any Time be able to promise himself riveted for Life in Opinion, and be certain that his Understanding shall never revoke her past Sentence? And if he cannot indeed be thus secure of his own Constancy and lasting Attachment, it will but ill become him to require too zealously of others their stedfast Adherence to Principles, which he knows not but he may possibly live one Day to change and contradict himself. It is, he is sensible, but a very unpromising

ſing Dependance for Diſciples where the Guide himſelf is liable to alter his Mind, which muſt ever be the neceſſary Situation of every Teacher, who derives his Authority from no higher a Principle or ſtronger Light than that of his own Reaſon. If he deal ingenuouſly in his Reſearches, and proſecute Truth with that Honeſty and Vigour which he ought, he muſt be unavoidably liable to Recantation every Moment of his Life without Remedy. For the Decrees of a human Underſtanding can, in their Nature, have no Pretenſion to be irreverſible. The cleareſt Εὑρηκα That can help us to, muſt ever leave Room for * φρουλίδες Ὑστεραι to ſuperſede it.

Too changeable.

And this is another very ſingular and eſſential Defect of a rational Faith, that it muſt *always be ſo very precarious.* For what Reaſon firſt eſtabliſhed, it is evident the ſame Reaſon muſt ever have the Power to repeal. Hence a rational Faith will ever be *ſubject to Change*, and the moſt fixed Reſolves and mature Determinations that Reaſon can make, muſt be always ready to be *turned about with every Wind of Doctrine*, as the Evidence ſhall ſhift to another Point. The Philoſopher, after his ſtrongeſt Concluſions, ſpeaks however very diffidently of their Continuance. Such, he ſays, are his preſent Sentiments upon the Subject; but that they will be always ſo, is what he can by no means anſwer for or enſure; ſince it is not impoſſible but ſome new Evidence may ſtill ſucceed of Weight to turn the Scale, and ſet Things again in a quite different Light from that in which they have hitherto appeared to him. And Reaſon can never, with any Show

* The Author is ſuppoſed here to allude to a Book of that Title, written, as I think, by the famous Dr. *Whitby*, in his later Years, and wherein he recanted ſome more Orthodox Opinion, which he had before laudably abetted.

of

of Juſtice, be ſo abſurdly partial and tenacious, as for the Sake of any Concluſions already made, to turn a deaf Ear to all future Suggeſtions, which may offer in the Cauſe, and which muſt have ſtill an equal Right to Audience with their favourite Predeceſſors, if the Sentence of our paſt Judgment cannot claim to be abſolutely definitive and infallible: Whereas it is the religious Man's Reſolution, as it is his Duty, to perſiſt in the Faith he has once eſpouſed to his Life's End. Convinced of the Truth of his adopted Goſpel, he diſclaims henceforth all farther Trial, and triumphs forthwith in ſuch a ſuppoſed Certainty, that he piouſly implores the Protection of Heaven to preſerve him firm in his preſent Situation, againſt the dangerous Power of any Innovation whatſoever, and all new Principles that might poſſibly alter and corrupt him.—It is impoſſible for me to ſuggeſt, or indeed for Nature to furniſh out a ſtronger Picture of that cool and moderate Temper of a Rationaliſt which I have been deſcribing, than that which our daily Experience preſents us with in the Caſe of *Converts* from one Religion to another. The Caſe of the World, where Reaſon is ever ſuppoſed to be the moſt eminently and viſibly concerned, and profeſſed to be indeed the ſole Principle in the Proceeding. Reduce a Man once by Argument from his original Prejudices, however groſs and abſurd, and that to the moſt juſt and well-grounded Perſuaſion in Nature, and ſee the Conſequence. Will the Attachment of ſuch a Proſelyte to his new Light bear any Degree of Proportion ever after to that he once expreſſed for thoſe occult and myſterious Articles, which he had derived without a Syllable of Controverſy from the Leſſons of his Parents? The ſetting him once to arguing for himſelf, has ſpoiled him for ever for any ſecond

Attachment

Attachment of the Kind. The Reverential Part of our Adherence, which takes its Riſe from a ſuppoſed ſacred Authority, being once removed, it is impoſſible we ſhould ever after be brought back again to pay the ſame profound and religious Deference to our own uncertain Reaſonings, and Diſcoveries of our own making. The juſt Horror of venturing at all upon ſuch a Queſtion, where the Truth of Religion is concerned, and where a Poſſibility of its Falſhood is actually ſuppoſed, is the beſt and only Security of our proper Veneration for the Subject. When once theſe important Out-works are demoliſhed, when once we are come ſo far as to make no Scruple of examining freely for ourſelves, the main Hold upon our religious Engagements is then broke through, and farewel for ever all the true Spirit of Diſcipleſhip. The very preſuming that we have a Right to call theſe Matters to a Re-hearing, and Abilities to decide in them for ourſelves, is an effectual Step taken towards the throwing off for the future all that obſequious Awe, and Dependance, which is the Life of this Cauſe. When once we have made a Practice of traverſing with ſo much Freedom the Avenues and Approaches of the Sanctuary, when once we have preſumptuouſly inured ourſelves to the *ſtamping* thus boldly and *familiarly over holy Ground*, we ſhall with Difficulty be recovered to a tender Senſe of the Reverence and Devotion due to the Place, to the pious Poſture of humble Supplicants, and Proſtration. Accordingly we may ever obſerve in our Proſelyte, that once turned adrift into Speculation, however he may anchor accidentally for a Time, his contracted Propenſity to Motion and Fluctuating will ſtill ſtick faſt to him in all Stations. That however fixed and ſatisfied he may imagine or profeſs himſelf, his Conſtancy and

Allegiance

Allegiance are no longer ſecure, than till a new Maſter ſhall offer to his better Liking. That amidſt all his Illumination profeſſed, he is yet no deſperate Subject for a freſh Application. He continues ſtill ſupine in his Devotion, and diſcovers no violent Partiality and Paſſion for the Cauſe. His Affections are but half inliſted, and by his Poſture, he is yet liſtening out for farther Intelligence. In ſhort, he wears his Perſuaſion all the while like one, who is always ready and diſpoſed to be *converted again*, whenever he ſhall meet with any thing that may appear more worthy his Attention or Engagement.

So far we may ſee is Reaſon in its Effects from contributing to the making of *one Flock and one Fold*, that it will but ill ſerve ſo much as to enſure *one ſtraggling Sheep*, that it has by Chance helped in thither.

Once more, as the rational Believer can never take upon him to pronounce himſelf inviolably ſecure in his Adherence to the Cauſe he has eſpouſed, ſo neither can he promiſe himſelf *that Complacency and Satisfaction of Mind*, reſulting from the Conſciouſneſs of ſuch a Faith, which is the bleſſed Fruit of that true and genuine Faith I contend for. For let your common Experience determine whether that Perſon does not enjoy his Belief with much greater Tranquillity and Confidence of Spirit, who never aſked himſelf one ſingle Queſtion about it, than he, who by the moſt elaborate Diſcuſſions, and buſieſt Search, has attained to the utmoſt Degree of moral Aſſurance in the Matter. The Philoſophical Believer, who built his Faith originally on the Force of Arguments, may poſſibly find thoſe Arguments not ſo readily occur to his Memory in thoſe gloomy Hours, when he has the moſt Occaſion for their Support, and conſequently will be liable

Would not miniſter that Spirit of Comfort in the Reflection.

at

at every Turn to his Miſgivings and Diſtruſts about the Sufficiency of thoſe Reaſonings he cannot for the preſent ſo well recollect; whilſt he, that has once arrived at the full and laſting Aſſurance of a juſt and heavenly Faith, can never be to ſeek at any Time for the Grounds and Motives of his firſt Conviction and Dependance: Having never, for his Part, dealt at all in the Evidence of Reaſon, he can never poſſibly have the Streſs of his Concluſions diminiſhed or obſcured by a Review, or be at any Loſs to recover all their original Force at Pleaſure; but muſt always have the ſame Baſis of his Hopes alike eſtabliſhed, and therefore muſt to the End be ſecure of enjoying all that Peace of Mind which *the World* and carnal Intelligence *cannot give*, without any the leaſt Interruption from the Caprice of Thought or Complexion.

Not of Force ſufficient to command our Paſſions.

In the laſt Place, no Conviction drawn from Reaſoning can ever have *Force enough to make us virtuous againſt our Inclinations*; the higheſt Degree of moral Aſſurance will never be a ſufficient Balance for preſent Temptations. The mortifying all our moſt beloved Affections, and reſtraining all the ſtrongeſt Propenſities of our Nature, (in which our Obedience to religious Rules conſiſts) is too ſubſtantial a Sacrifice to be made to the moſt ſpecious Suggeſtions of our own fallacious Reaſonings. We may well conclude, that he who framed the human mechaniſm, and conſequently underſtands ſo thoroughly the neceſſary Influences of all its various Springs, will always take Care to proportion the Evidence of the Reward propoſed to the Difficulty of the Duty required. A Command, that expects us to give up all the Demands of our deareſt Paſſions to its Authority, muſt be introduced to us, at leaſt, by no doubtful Account or Teſtimony at all liable to be controverted.

ed. Venerable Tradition and Hiſtorical Records, though never ſo plauſible and well atteſted, under all the moſt favourable Circumſtances that the ſevereſt Malice of an exceptious Critic can demand, or the moſt provident Invention of a ſubtle Impoſtor frame, can yet never, with all its boaſted Pretenſions, be a ſufficient Baſis for a Belief, which is to produce a new Courſe of Life, and an abſolute Maſtery of our Paſſions, in Oppoſition to all the importunate Solicitations of Senſe, and the violent Appetites of depraved Nature. It is ſtill all but *human Teſtimony* this, in its Nature ever liable to Error, as depending only on fallible Authors. And however forcibly ſuch an Evidence may operate for the preſent upon our Judgment whilſt actually under Conſultation, however it may induce us at our ſpeculative Hours to pronounce peremptorily in Behalf of its full Sufficiency, and of the abſolute Certainty of the Points it conveys; we ſhall ſee all its true Amount and Weight in a juſter Light at thoſe Seaſons when we expect to make Uſe of it, and feel its Influence, and ſhall be apt to remember involuntarily when we come to Action, and ſome darling Paſſion croſſed by it puts the Queſtion in good earneſt home to us, that it is nothing more than *the precarious Conjecture of a fallible Judge, upon the traditional Teſtimony of a fallible Witneſs:* A ſlender Foundation for a Principle, which is to have ſuch vital and heroic Efficacy through the Conduct of our whole Lives! Can a Scheme, thus vouched and aſcertained, be ever expected to gain that prevailing Aſcendency over our Minds, as to change thus wonderfully all our obvious and palpable Intereſts, and take off all our Regard from Objects preſent and familiar to our Deſires, to bring us to depend confidently on diſtant Expectations and Promiſes

Promiſes for our Compenſation? I will very readily grant you all the moral Certainty in theſe Proofs that you can deſire; and farther, that this is indeed the higheſt Degree of rational Evidence that the Nature of the Subject can poſſibly admit. What I contend for is, that it *muſt be ſomething ſtill greater*, and more abſolutely concluſive and ſatisfactory, *to anſwer the Purpoſe of enforcing a holy Life*, and to weigh in the Scale againſt demonſtrative Good; that we ſhall hardly be induced to quit what we actually *feel*, for any leſs Conſideration than ſomething which we actually *know*; that nothing leſs than a thorough Conviction can effectually ſecure a thorough Reformation. To deter Men from taking up with an Enjoyment already in their Power, they muſt have the cleareſt Proſpect of ſomething better to ſucceed in its Room. Things preſent have all the Advantage on their Side in bidding to our Senſes, and the moſt valuable Reverſions are but of ſmall Regard in Competition with what is before us. Nor can we be juſtly blamed for this Conduct. Our Reaſon bids us make ſure of ſomething, and not part with the Good we have to truſt too far to Futurity for Amends, if there be the leaſt Poſſibility of our being diſappointed in our Security. And therefore it is by no means ſufficient to ſay that there is a great Appearance of Probability, and that Truth ſeems to lye on this Side of the Queſtion. *The defending Sword muſt play full in Sight*, or *the delicious Apple* will infallibly be ſnatched at for Want of a Diſſuaſive of equal Force to reſtrain us.——And if this rational Faith will not, as I have hitherto ſhewed, ſerve us even defenſively, and on common Emergencies, ſo much as to make a good living Chriſtian, much leſs will it ſtill to *produce a faithful Martyr* upon Occaſion, if ever ſo ſevere an

Much leſs to make us ſuffer Martyrdom.

an Exercise of it be demanded at our Hands. Here is yet a more conspicuous Instance of that absolute Certainty which there ought to be in our Faith for such a Purpose, since the strongest Operations of our Reason can never point out Truth to us in a Light glaring and forcible enough to furnish such an Experiment. The glorious and undaunted Confessors that have encountred this last terrible Consequence, and actually triumphed over this fiery Trial of their Persuasion, proceeded upon a much higher and surer Principle to bear them out in all their heroic Sufferings, otherwise I must be free to think that *Abner*'s Elegy would have suited the bravest of them, " *Died he as a* " *Fool dieth.*" Such Degrees of Fortitude are no Effects for ordinary Conviction to produce, the strongest moral Assurance is not that cordial Reflection and Dependance that can inspire all this amazing Constancy and Resolution into Men expiring under the last Extremity of Torture, nor the most flattering *Likelihoods* a Match for the present and certain Pangs of agonizing upon the Rack. The Philosopher thus pressed would be apt, with a very natural Casuistry, to distinguish betwixt *Opinions* and *Principles*, and to remit much of his Tenaciousness under such Circumstances. Rational Conviction will readily be distrusted when Matters come to such a Crisis, though perhaps never before suspected in a State of indolent Toleration, and the smooth Calms of Life. Men at such a Season will naturally be alarmed to enquire more nearly what Grounds they stand upon in the Point, when once they find that they must indeed put all to the Hazard to retain it, and be compelled to seal their Professions, if they will abide by them, with their Blood. Such a Prospect will rouze them in good earnest to a different kind of Examination from

what has hitherto entered into their Thoughts, to know for certain what they have to truſt to, or determine in the Caſe ; ſo near a Concern will immediately engage their beſt Attention, and the Service of all their Faculties in the Cauſe ; it will put them upon computing with the moſt impartial Exactneſs the Advantage and Loſs attending each important Alternative, and making the ſtricteſt prudential Eſtimate upon the Matter. They will then be ſolicitous to know, by all poſſible Means of Scrutiny, the full Worth and Merits of a Cauſe that is likely to prove ſo expenſive to them. Their Prejudices and Punctilios they will be diſpoſed to lay but ſmall Streſs on under ſuch Diſadvantages, and will, it is probable, not be over-forward to give, even to the Appearance of Reaſon herſelf, any thing more than what it will well and ſtrictly bear. In fine, will it be any thing very uncharitable to ſuppoſe, that a modeſt Diffidence of our own Determinations may prove the Reſult of our maturer Thoughts in this Dilemma ; that the chief of our Diſcoveries will be in the End the great Duty of Self-preſervation in Uncertainties ; and that both Nature and Reaſon ſhould unite their Voices to determine us anew to lower our Flag of Defiance, and not to venture to *die for our Deductions?* The Rationaliſt may indeed, in his Retirement, be wonderfully affected with the abſtracted Contemplation of his Diſcoveries, and his formed Reſolutions of conſtantly perſiſting in them ; but when once he is called upon to exert its promiſed Influence, and put it to a Teſt like this, he will ſoon be convinced, that he muſt call in much greater Aid than that of plauſible Hypotheſes, to confirm him ſtedfaſt amidſt the Rage and Cruelty of malicious Murtherers, and enable him to be faithful to the laſt to a perſecuted Religion, and

that nothing, but a fixed and well-grounded Confidence of being happy for ever in another World, can effectually prevail on him to renounce all his Hopes and Intereſts in this. Where we are to act up to ſuch an exalted Height as to *ſtrive unto Blood*, we muſt have ſome very ſubſtantial and viſible Inducement before us to keep up our Spirits in the Conflict; *the exceeding Weight of Glory* will have but little Weight with us, till it be firſt *fully revealed*, we muſt have this *Heaven* actually *opened to our View*, and *behold the Son of Man ſtanding plainly before our Eyes*, (not through the dim and obſcure *Perſpectives* of Hiſtory and Tradition) to ſupport and reward us.

Thus far the many obvious Difficulties that ariſe merely from the very Face of the Matter itſelf, when we conſider religious Faith as a Thing to be determined by our Reaſon, and what naturally and readily occurs to us in reflecting from ſuch a Suppoſition.

My next Proof propoſed was, That *Reflection and common Senſe were ſeconded and confirmed in this Point by the Divine Word itſelf*, and that it was plain from Scripture, that no ſuch Appeal to the Underſtanding was actually ever made or intended.

It is indeed but Juſtice due to the Glorious and Heaven-concerted Scheme of our Salvation, to ſhew, that no ſuch abſurd and prepoſterous Project was ever offered to be ſet on Foot in the Cauſe; that the *Fountain of all Wiſdom* did indeed never form or amuſe us with any ſuch ſtrange Propoſal, as, — "Judge whether you "have Time or not; judge whether you are "Judges or not; judge all for yourſelves, and "yet judge all alike.

Now this Part of my Aſſertion would, I think, demand of me only a ſmall Degree of my In-

duſtry for its Juſtification. I ſhould, I apprehend, have little more than merely to collect and range for the Purpoſe, all thoſe Expreſſions, both literal and figurative, that treat of the Nature of Faith, or have any Relation to the Subject. Such as, — Leſt they ſhould *underſtand with their Hearts*; — Their fooliſh *Heart* was darkned; — Purified their *Hearts* by Faith. Expreſſons, applicable with no Propriety to the intellectual Faculty, but evidently deſcriptive of the Will only.

But, as Quotations in Behalf of doctrinal Points are many Times liable to have their Application diſputed, and it is perhaps often difficult enough to aſcertain critically their juſt Senſe and Meaning againſt all the ſpecious Exceptions of prejudiced Wit, I ſhall chuſe rather, for the preſent, to enlarge upon a Particular, which appears to me entirely uncontrovertible; and that is, the plain narrative Part of that Hiſtory, as far as it relates to the Buſineſs of planting the Goſpel, and the Manner by which it was attempted; of which we have, happily for my Purpoſe, ſo exact and diſtinct an Account there given us. On this Circumſtance, therefore, I ſhall chiefly reſt my Appeal, and doubt not to make good my promiſed Proof, by producing only to you a ſhort Review of the Courſe of Proceedings taken by the bleſſed Apoſtles and their Maſter, as we find it recounted by themſelves, in that Undertaking.

Chriſt did not propoſe his Doctrines to Examination.

Did our Saviour himſelf, then, lay the Arguments and Proofs of his Miſſion frankly before his Diſciples, and then give them Time to conſider calmly of their Force, and Liberty to determine thereon, as their Reaſon ſhould direct them? Or did they, when thoroughly perſuaded, ever take any ſuch Courſe themſelves amongſt their intended Proſelytes? — No ſuch Matter.

Matter. For his Part, *he taught them, as one having Authority.* He conſidered himſelf as the Perſon he was, as one who derived from Heaven the Inſtructions he was communicating, and therefore taught them very juſtly, as a Maſter who had a Right to dictate, and preſcribe to his Pupils without Reply. And, alas! if he had taken the other Method, they knew nothing of Reaſoning; it was a Matter quite out of their Element; they had had their Education on the Water; and though they underſtood their Trade, ſo far as to be well vers'd in the Uſe of their own Nets, would go near, it is likely, to be ſoon entangled themſelves, when they had to do with the figurative ones of Sophiſtry or Syllogiſm. That he did but ill approve the being called on upon any Occaſion to explain, will readily appear, when we obſerve, how cautious and reſerved thoſe who were beſt acquainted with his Manner were in that Particular; how *fearful* at every Turn of giving Offence, and *incurring Reproof* by any farther Enquiry, even at Times when they did not really apprehend his Meaning. With what ſtrong Circumſtances of Approbation and Applauſe is a ready Acquieſcence always recorded for our Imitation? What Matter of greater Merit do we meet with than this of an *extempore* Subſcription? Whereas Reaſon is naturally a ſlow, diſtruſtful, exceptious Scholar, ever backward to give any great Confidence as long as ſhe can find the leaſt Room to ſtart new Difficulties. "*We will hear thee again of this Matter*, is the true adjourning Spirit and Style of the Academic: Whereas the Language of the Goſpel is at once, "*Believe you that I am able to do this?* The Conviction, you ſee, was to precede the Evidence, as the Terms of the Favour to be conſequently conferred. *The Phariſees*, it is ſaid,

tempting him, asked a Sign; that is, some Testimonial of the Truth of his declared Mission: And what did this Request produce? Why, he *sighed deeply* at their Perverseness, who were so hard to be convinced, and stiled them a *foolish and adulterous Generation* for their Presumption. Now, this desiring a rational Evidence for their Discipleship, the *seeking after a Sign*, as the Scripture terms it, had, if he had indeed appealed to their Understandings, been so far from any Thing criminal or blame-worthy, that it had been in all Reason their indispensable Duty; whereas it was, it seems, in Faith an unwarrantable, presumptuous, and wanton Curiosity. In like manner, there was nothing to be said to the inquisitive and sifting Humour of the *Greeks*, since nothing would pass with them but the strictest Reasonings, to which they were so strongly addicted, that it was justly expected, they would not have scrupled to have demanded peremptorily his Credentials, even of their Saviour, and put their daring Interrogatories to the Holy Spirit himself.

Nor his Apostles.

The Successors in the Ministry we find continuing the same Method of Practice exactly in their Turn, and treading punctually in their Master's Steps in the Execution of their Office, insisting constantly on the ready Acknowledgment of their Doctrines, without any Concessions of Time for Doubt or Deliberation. Of the Terms of the Covenant, one Declaration was often thought sufficient; not to accept them then was to reject them, and the least standing-off gave up the Unbeliever to Reprobation.

Had not Leisure for such a Method.

Nor could it possibly be otherwise, if we consider the Situation of the Preacher in the Infancy of Revelation, and what an extensive Province he had to run through with his Intelligence. He must of course be always in haste to get on, and could

could have no Time to ſpare, if he were ſo diſpoſed. His Commiſſion required him to keep ſtirring. *The Harveſt was plenteous* upon his Hands, and That alone muſt oblige his Hearers to come in at ſhort Warning, to ſnatch the critical Opportunity, or fairly expect to ſtand to the Loſs. Itinerants could not afford to attend impertinent Queries, and loſe their precious Moments in Controverſies. To believe, or not, was at every one's own Choice; thoſe that are obſtinate, let them look to it. *The Duſt* was to be forthwith *ſhaken off againſt them, and the Doom pronounced.* Their Office was only to circulate their Creeds; they were not ſent to diſpute, but to preach; not to wrangle, but inſtruct. It was Qualification enough, in ſuch a Caſe, for a Miſſionary to be furniſhed with his Manifeſto; Arguments could evidently be of no Service to Perſons who could make no longer Stay in a Place. And therefore we ſee it was abſolutely requiſite, as was remarked, from their Circumſtances, that their Diſciples ſhould be thus expeditious in their Motions, and comply without the leaſt Heſitation. And accordingly, we find that whole Congregations were often gained over at a Hearing, and Thouſands at a Time actually convinced by a ſingle Lecture. *So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed.* Such a one was the Eunuch we read of, the Proſelyte of a ſhort Stage, inſtructed one Hour, and baptized the next. Sufficient Proofs that there was no ſtanding to make Exceptions in the Caſe; if they had a Right to do that, they muſt have had a farther Right too to multiply their Replies at Diſcretion, and, in fine, to have held to their own Opinions, and not be convinced at laſt.

Nor were indeed theſe Inſtructors in themſelves qualified to go through with any ſuch regular Way *Nor Qualifications.*

of Attack, if the Nature of their Commiſſion had admitted it. They wanted as much the Skill and Addreſs to manage a Controverſy, as the Leiſure to attend it. They were no Proficients in any Science, but, on the contrary, the moſt artleſs and illiterate Perſons living. A ſhrewd Intimation, as it is ſo often juſtly repreſented to us, that ſuch were purpoſely choſen out to be the Inſtruments to convey this Knowledge to us, that there might not be the leaſt ſeeming Room for any miſtaken Notion of the Kind; that we might not poſſibly be tempted to attribute to Reaſon's Force, or impute to any perſonal Art or Acquiſition of their own, an Effect which was to be the ſole and immediate Act of the Divinity, and wherein the *Power of God* was in a particular Manner to be glorified. For the ſame Reaſon the ſingle Perſon amongſt them, who was poſſeſſed of the ſuppoſed Advantages of human Learning, reſolves, we ſee, immediately from the firſt Moment of his commencing Apoſtle, to leave it all behind him, and abſolutely to diſclaim all farther Acquaintance with it. He was determined to *know nothing elſe* amongſt his Diſciples *but Chriſt crucified*, nor to make any Uſe of *the Wiſdom of Words*, leſt *the Croſs of Chriſt ſhould be made of none Effect*. Even the Followers of the Impoſtor *Mahomet* are ſo ſenſible of the Advantage of ſuch a Preſumption in their Favour, and enter ſo deeply into this Way of Reaſoning, that we hear them boaſting at every Turn when they deſire to do the greateſt Honour to their Prophet, and as a moſt undoubted Mark of his Divinty, *that he could neither write, nor read.* And as the original and firſt Negotiators both received and practiſed themſelves according to this conſtant Rule, in the very ſame Style again run all their paſtoral Charges and Inſtructions

ſtructions continued to their deputed Succeſſors when they are iſſuing out new Commiſſions of Apoſtleſhip, and giving Directions for the Treatment of a Novice, who might happen to be not yet quite ſo thoroughly in the Perſuaſion.—— "*Him that is weak in the Faith receive.*" Yes;—but how? why, to inſtruct him better;—not by any means to confute or argue with him, —*not to doubtful Diſputations.*

The very Suppoſition evidently prepoſterous from the Nature of the Thing.

On the contrary, how wild a Suppoſition this of their propoſing to proceed by Reaſoning in ſuch an Undertaking, how repugnant to every Notion of common Senſe all Expectation or Poſſibility of the Kind, will readily appear, by conſidering but for one Moment what muſt have been the neceſſary Conſequences of ſuch a Miſſion, where the Underſtandings of the whole Audience were to be ſingly appealed to for Approbation. Why, the Conſequence, doubtleſs, of ſuch a Proceeding would have been, that very many would have found themſelves intirely at a loſs to form any Judgment at all of the Matter; many would have ſubſcribed abſolutely to its Demands, and gone away fully ſatisfied of its Veracity; and others again, as ſtrongly decrying its Authority, and deriding all Notion of its Pretenſions. Ever in all ſuch Caſes the Report muſt naturally be the ſame which we find of the great Apoſtle's Succeſs amongſt his Philoſophical Audience, *Some believed the Things which were ſpoken, and ſome believed not.* How is it poſſible in the Nature of the Thing it ſhould be otherwiſe? The beſt of Arguments are liable to have greater or leſs Effects, and operate in very different Degrees, according to the different Hands they happen to fall into. Much more, if we conſider on what critical and abſtracted Kind of Topicks ſuch a Courſe of Proofs as was to be introductory

ductory of a new and perfective Revelation must chiefly have been supposed to turn. *Eternal Relations*, *moral Differences of Things*, and a precise Delineation of *the Religion of Nature and its Obligations*, seem readily to occur, all as so many indispensable preliminary Articles to be treated of in the Way, and inculcated as the Foundation of such an intended Superstructure. And are these, however certain in themselves, such obvious Truths as can never possibly *appear* otherwise, and from which it is not to be supposed any one can ever possibly deviate, or one Moment withhold his Assent? Rather may they not be reasonably expected to be found often producing an Effect something short of such total and absolute Conviction, sufficient indeed to make the Cause appear very plausible and promising, yet not to the entire Exclusion of all Colour of remaining Scruple upon the Subject? But alas! the drawing different or partial Conclusions; the affecting of Re-hearings, and desiring to take Time to consider, are Concessions no way compatible with the Demands of an Apostle, who brings with him Doctrines *of instant and universal Use*, and therefore expects very justly to make his Converts with a Word's speaking. The begging Leave to suspend our Decision, and be excused the pronouncing Sentence, is a Language favouring of very little Acquaintance with these Matters, and such as would by no means be endured upon the Occasion. The thinking to evade the Consequence, by commencing an indifferent Stander-by, is a Scheme that will very ill answer the Ends of a Preacher of the Gospel; a Proposition of no ordinary Import, and which must be taken to be either absolutely received, or obstinately rejected, wherever it is once proposed, admits of no assenting by halves, or being with *Agrippa*, *almost per-*

perſuaded to be a Chriſtian. A divided Verdict, or the bare Acknowledgment of its Probability, will never ſerve for a ſatisfactory Account, where Souls are depending; or anſwer the Purpoſes of a Goſpel inſtituted to the Intent, that *all ſhould believe on his holy Name.* To ſecure ſuch a Conſequence as this, all theſe Kinds of Proofs that fall under the Cognizance of Reaſon, muſt ever be ſhort and inſufficient, which the Magnifiers of its rational and moral Evidence ſeem not to be aware of, nor to remember all the while that all this boaſted Demonſtration, in which they ſo much confide and triumph, does, with all its undeniable Force, unfortunately ſtill require one equal Degree of Capacity to apprehend, and give them a proper Hold and Influence, and can therefore never poſſibly be accounted thoſe cogent and effective Means, which an all-wiſe Deſigner could purpoſe to rely on, for the *drawing all Men to himſelf.* That it is certainly in Strictneſs diſcoverable by *Teleſcopes*, and the nice and accurate Obſervations of *the Curious*, is by no means a ſuitable Character and Property of *that Light which was prepared* (undoubtedly to ſhine out) *before the Face of all People.* It was not ſurely for ſuch an Inſtructor to propoſe Problems to our Conſideration, either indifferent in their Nature, or uncertain in their Conſequence; to be concerning himſelf in the ſtating Caſes whoſe Determination might be diſpenſed with, and in which he muſt very often expect to be loſing his Labour. But thoſe, who are for ſubmitting it to every one's Examination, ſay no more of Chriſtianity, than that it is indeed a good uſeful Sort of Scheme for thoſe that it happens to ſuit, and that ſuch as can reliſh it, and find themſelves *able to receive it*, do for their Parts do well to receive it. And was it in Truth, can we ſuppoſe, for the

Sake

Sake of any ſuch Concluſion, and to enforce ſuch a Perſuaſion about his Errand, that the only Son of God, and Partner of the Divinity, could demean this exalted Nature, to ſtruggle through a long Courſe of human Paſſions and Temptations, and be content to expire at laſt under ſuch accumulated Circumſtances of Anguiſh and Horror upon the accurſed Tree, and all, as it ſeems, by this Account, to recommend his Doctrines only to the Opinion of a few Men of Parts, who were happily formed with Faculties to conceive his Proofs? However uſeful they might in the Event prove to their warmeſt Votaries on ſuch Terms for their Influence, as a well-concerted Syſtem; ſuch a Diſpenſation, and ſo looſe a Tie, muſt evidently forfeit, at firſt View, all manner of Pretenſions to any divine Foundation, or univerſal Juriſdiction, and be abſolutely deſtructive of all Notion of a *one Thing neceſſary* in the Caſe. If a Man is to be held only by his own Reaſonings in the Point, what is this but directly licenſing a Diſſent from the Goſpel, wherever its Evidence may happen not to obtain; and ſtamping an equal Mark of neceſſary Truth upon a thouſand oppoſite Opinions? Now if the Caſe of invincible Ignorance, which theſe Moderators pronounce ſo tenderly upon, be indeed a Plea to be ever tolerated, and uncovenanted Mercy lies ſtill open to ſuch as, from ſome natural Inſtinct and Impediment, are conſtrained to refuſe the Tender of a Saviour's Name and Mediation, what are become, in the mean Time, of all the Privileges of *the Pale?* Where are the mighty Advantages ariſing from the inliſting in the choſen Flock, if this Heaven be once preſumed thus equally capable of admitting Outlyers upon the ſame footing, and allowed a common Receptacle for the Partizans on both Sides of the Queſtion? But how prepoſterous to

Ima-

imagination to conceive, that at the taking the aſt ſolemn and general Account of the Friends nd Retainers of Chriſt, that when proper Rewards come to be diſpenſed as due amongſt his Followers, and *the Mark of the Lamb* called for o be produced as the Characteriſtic and Claim of he Elect, that the great Judge of Hearts ſhould hen actually declare in Favour likewiſe of the uſt Exceptions of ſincere Unbelievers, and (at he ſame Time that he is giving the ſevereſt Sentence againſt the wilfully obſtinate and diſobedient) admit this ſtrange Diſtinction, and that with regard to this diſſenting Claſs; they were not indeed included in the general Precept, nor the Terms of the Goſpel calculated at all for their Uſe or Apprehenſion; that they, on the contrary, laboured under the inſuperable Incapacity of a particular Infidel-Make, and Antichriſtian Complexion; and therefore could not, with any Colour of Reaſon, be expected to join in giving an Aſſent, which was, by no Default of theirs, entirely out of their Power. That he muſt therefore ſtill do them the Juſtice to acknowledge their *equal Merit* in their Oppoſition, and invite them of courſe to take their Places amongſt the Saints, and ſit down with *Abraham*, *Iſaac*, and *Jacob*, and all the prime Martyrs and Confeſſors for the Cauſe, in the Kingdom of Heaven. " *Well done* " *good*, though *unfaithful*, *Servant*; thou haſt " diſbelieved me from Prejudices which I myſelf " gave thee; *enter thou*, however, *into the Joy* " *of thy Lord*." How much more agreeable rather to Equity and Expectation, is the promiſed Courſe of Proceeding with ſuch a principled Proteſter, and the *denying him*, in his Turn, *before the holy Angels*, who has dared, upon whatever fancied Grounds, to *deny his* Judge *before Men*. If this were not indeed the Caſe, there had been

very

very little Need of the Expence of a Miracle for the reducing of St. *Paul* to the State of Chriſtianity and Apoſtleſhip, who might, according to this Account, have ſucceeded juſt as well in the Quality of *Saul the Perſecutor*; ſince that firſt Zeal of his was certainly, ſo conſider'd, in itſelf equally meritorious; when, as he teſtifies of himſelf, *he verily thought that he ought to do many Things contrary to the Name of Jeſus of Nazareth.*

But here again, I have, I am very ſenſible, been holding you for ſome Time paſt in the higheſt Impatience of Zeal to interpoſe and remind me, that if theſe Founders of Chriſtianity did not indeed make their Appeals to Men's reaſoning Faculty, it was becauſe they were endowed with a readier and more deciſive Means of Conviction in its Stead; one more ſuitable both to the Capacities of their Audience, and their own neceſſary Courſe of Diſpatch, which I have been deſcribing; and this, by an immediate Appeal to their Senſes, by performing Works before their Faces, in Atteſtation of thoſe Doctrines, which it was confeſſedly not within the Reach of any human Power to produce.

Miracles not meant as Arguments;

To all which one might, I think, not unplauſibly, ſuggeſt in return, what has been ſo often urged upon the Occaſion, that Miracles have, Time out of Mind, been undoubtedly performed, as well in Favour of falſe Doctrines, and therefore can never be ſingly, and of themſelves alone, any certain Marks of a true. This the Scripture itſelf confeſſes, when it warns us of *lying Wonders, and falſe Chriſts*; to take the moſt exact Care and Caution what we give Credit to of the kind; and recommends to us the farther and more ſecure Trial of them, by what it calls *their Fruits.* It allows plainly, by ſending us thus to trace Analogies, and conſult more known Relations

Becauſe uſed by Impoſtors.

tions for the Experiment, that we have no proper Ground to aſcertain any Truth from theſe Appearances, diſtinctly conſidered, without having this Recourſe to a ſurer Standard, and calling in the foreign Aid of moral Conſiderations to *confirm* their Authority. It is indeed the moſt I think their ſtrongeſt Advocates will at preſent inſiſt upon in Behalf of their Weight and Intereſt in the Queſtion, that they concur only in contributing their Part jointly, with other concomitant Circumſtances, towards the raiſing all together a full and competent Degree of Evidence for our Reliance. One might alledge yet farther, that all this wonderful and miraculous Evidence, as you regard it, was indeed, in Strictneſs, but the natural Effect of their Doctrine, inſtead of any ſupernatural Proof of its Veracity; which may be beſt learnt by conſidering the Nature of theſe extraordinary Actions, and the Occaſions on which they were generally produced. For Inſtance, the mighty Act of *caſting out Devils* does not ſurely neceſſarily imply any ſuch Purpoſe in it, as the mere ſhewing of divine Power; the diſlodging that potent and inſidious Adverſary of Mankind, from his uſurped Seats in a human Breaſt, ſeems to carry in it manifeſt Reaſon enough of its own beſides, without any ſuch impoſed Conſtruction of it. For may it not rather be conſidered naturally enough, as an Act only in the Way of their Function, and abſolutely never to be omitted by ſuch as profeſs to plant the Goſpel? The *healing of the Sick* ſeems in like manner to want no ſuch laboured Account to explain it, but to ſpeak itſelf ſufficiently in its own beneficial Tendency. It was a ſuitable Inſtance of that univerſal Benevolence they were recommending, and which it would be very hard to conſider apart from its Merits and Influence, as practiſed on an indiffe-

Natural Effects of Goſpel Benevolence.

rent

rent and fruitleſs Occaſion, merely as expreſſive of the Power they acted by. It muſt ſeem ſtrange too, if our Lord had any ſuch Meaning as *to convince* by theſe Works, that he ſhould be always ſo remarkably upon the Reſerve in that Reſpect, whenever he happened amongſt unbelieving Company; that he ſhould be ſo particularly ſparing of theſe ſuppoſed Arguments, amongſt the very Perſons who ſeemed moſt to want them. More plainly ſtill, that he had no ſuch Intention to prove his own Truth and Character by theſe Inſtances of his Power; he often induſtrouſly avoided that accidental Conſequence, and took particular Care to prevent their ever coming to publick Notice, by diſmiſſing moſt of the Company and Attendants, before he began to proceed to the Operation. So far from retaining the grateful Patients as Witneſſes to communicate what they had experienced, that their Mouths were by ſpecial Command ſhut faſt from the Liberty of proclaiming the Benefits they had received, and the ſtricteſt Silence enjoined them with regard to the Author. *See thou tell no Man*, was generally the Charge. Which ſhews what Credit or Reputation he affected in all his good Offices, of which he was ſo ſolicitous to ſtifle every the leaſt Report. So far from laying hold on any miraculous Occaſion that offer'd for Matter of Proof, that when the expell'd Spirits were officious of their own Accord, and in Oppoſition to their own Intereſt, to proclaim their Knowledge of his divine Character to the World, the Diſcovery was by no Means permitted at their Hands, but their Tongues immediately reſtrained, and an Act of Omnipotence exerted to oblige them to Silence.

Eſpecial Care taken not to have them made publick.

Among innumerable Inſtances of the Kind, that appear to me to favour this Conſequence, let me

farther juſt mention to you that of *Herod*, whom we find recorded, not much to his Advantage, that he *wanted to ſee ſome Miracle done by him*; which if they had been at all calculated for the Purpoſe of converting, would have been ſurely countenanced and cultivated as a good promiſing Symptom and Mark of a towardly Diſpoſition for future Diſcipleſhip. The coming deſirous to canvaſs the Evidence, though from no other Principle perhaps, originally, than that of gratifying a light Curioſity, were, one would imagine, a Turn of Mind to be favourably entertained, and carefully cheriſhed in a Novice, by any who was ſolicitous to grain Proſelytes by ſuch Means, and conſcious of having any thing of the Kind to produce to him. But, on the contrary, we find our Maſter ever diſclaiming, with the ſevereſt Reſentment, all Followers of that Complexion; and no Temper check'd and diſcourag'd with ſo conſtant an Averſion, as this of, as it is opprobiouſly termed, *ſeeking a Sign*. There cannot be, I think, a ſtronger and more expreſs Reproof to all ſuch Notions and Conſtructions of his good Offices, than That he makes Uſe of, in Jealouſy of Heart, upon being applied to for an Inſtance of this extraordinary Aſſiſtance in favour of the Nobleman's Child —*Unleſs you ſee Signs and Wonders*, ſays he, *you will not believe*. Indeed, ſo far from any View of the Kind, or with any Tendency towards the reclaiming Men's Minds to a proper Senſe and Reverence for the Actor, do all theſe extraordinary Eſſays ſeem directed; ſo far from having any the leaſt Connexion with the Thought of procuring Diſciples from the Influence of the Spectacle, that a certain Degree, and that no ordinary one, of previous Confidence and Perſuaſion appears to have been conſtantly ſtipulated for beforehand, to entitle them to have

The ſeeking them diſcouraged.

their Applications at all liſten'd to, or regarded; and to be the ſole Meaſure and Rule of diſpenſing theſe occaſional Favours. Wherever we find them conferr'd, it was ſtill firſt *perceiving that* the Patient *had Faith to be healed.* Wherever there was the leaſt Room to diſtruſt ſuch a preparatory Proviſion, he ſeems to capitulate, and guard with eſpecial Care, that a Miracle ſhould not be even accidentally a Means of Converſion, by diſmiſſing the Petitioner with a conditional Remedy, which was to take Effect only in Proportion to his preſent Qualifications of the Kind, and of which his Succeſs was to be the ſure Teſt. *According to your Faith, be it unto you,* were the Terms. As elſewhere he attributes profeſſedly the whole Efficacy of a Miracle that had taken place, to that ſingle Preliminary; *Thy Faith* (that of which I found thee already poſſeſt) *hath made thee whole.*

Thus much I have ventured to intimate of my own Sentiment upon this ſtrong Hold, as it is by ſome eſteem'd, of miraculous Evidence; and ſuch it is, as I cannot but imagine, muſt needs appear ſufficiently concluſive and ſatisfactory for the Purpoſes for which it is produced. But what if now, in Deference to ſome contrary Opinions, I am ſtill diſpoſed to give up all this Part of the Argument? What if I am yet content, after all, to grant you readily to the Extent of your Demand, that theſe Miracles were indeed diſplayed merely for that End you ſuppoſe, and carry with them all that invincible Demonſtration you contend for? How will this yet ſerve the Purpoſe? To whom were they ſuch Demonſtration? To thoſe only who ſaw them. Certainly to none elſe. They were Conviction enough at that Inſtant of Time, and upon that Spot, When and Where they were exhibited. But wherever either of theſe Circumſtances fail, all that reſiſtleſs Force of the Evidence muſt

muſt fail with it. What They ſaw, will ſerve well to convict that one Generation to which theſe Wonders were immediately addreſt. *Sufficient to the Day is the* Evidence *thereof*; but no more. Theſe *mighty Works* could be no Demonſtration to any that were not actually and perſonally preſent when they were done; and, for the ſame evident Reaſon, can be none to us *Now*. All that we can poſſibly know of the Matter at this Diſtance, will amount, in the ſtricteſt Calculation, to no more than moral Appearances of Truth, and probable Atteſtations of the Fact.

Antiquity muſt impair much of their Weight.

And are we to imagine now, that God would ever leave a Matter of ſuch Conſequence upon ſuch a Foundation? That he, who vouchſafed at firſt to create, and then to redeem, at ſo great an Expence, the Souls of all Mankind, would have ſat down, after all, lightly contented to have ſcatter'd thus partially and accidentally his neceſſary Light amongſt a very few, and leave all the reſt of us to the Courteſy only of a few Reporters; to ſuch a Teſtimony, as, if it were never ſo falſe, it were abſolutely impoſſible we could, in our Situation and Circumſtances, ever diſcover to be ſo? To ſuch an Evidence as, though never ſo plauſible and well eſtabliſhed, can never, as I have obſerved, carry ſufficient Weight with it to be a governing Principle through Life, to influence our Conduct againſt our Nature, and be an effectual Check and Reſtraint upon all our wilful and unruly Appetites. A Truth which *all Men* are ſo deeply concerned *to know, and act upon* the Strength of it, muſt needs, one would think, be ſomething more equally and generally diſtributed, ſomething more *certain* in its Nature, and more *diffuſive* in its Influence. And anſwerable accordingly to ſuch a Characteriſtic, is that Light which he hath truly *prepared before the*

Face of all People. His Mercy hath he openly ſhewed in the Sight of the Heathen, and all the Ends of the World have ſeen the Salvation of our God.

If the Church of *Rome* may be allowed of any Weight upon the Queſtion, (and there are none that ſpeak generally in higher Terms of this Kind of Evidence) it appears plainly enough from their own Practices what is their Senſe of this Matter. That Miracles, *that ever ceaſe*, are by no means a competent Support for the Cauſe, or to be produced as ſubſtantial and concluſive Teſtimonies for the Truth of their Religion. They ſhew, I ſay, very ſufficiently how abſolutely eſſential in their Eſteem the Circumſtance of *Continuance* is for any ſuch Application, when they have Recourſe to the Counterfeit of its Appearance for a Supply; when they pretend their conſtant and uninterrupted Succeſſion to this Day, and actually attempt to keep falſe and fictitious ones on foot for the Purpoſe.

If Miracles were neceſſary in the Infancy of the Goſpel, they are ſo ſtill, and will be to the End of the World: Whenever they ceaſe, the Authority of the Evidence which depended on them ceaſes with them. That Divine Demonſtration to By-ſtanders, the Voice of God himſelf, *This is my beloved Son*, has been, by one intervening Age, dwindled long ſince to human Tradition; God no longer bears Witneſs to his Son, but Men only bear Witneſs to God. The Date will quite change the Property of the Evidence, and really make all this Difference. We hear no more that awful Sound, but by Repetition and Echo, and all that commanding Force of the great original Atteſtation and Acknowledgment is ſunk with us, into the uncertain Aſſertions of fallible Men relating it after one another. And therefore

fore the neglected Preacher can at this Time of Day (if he applies to their Reason) remonstrate against an unbelieving Audience with no severer a Charge, than that of the Prophet's, *Lord, who "hath believed our Report?"* For a Miracle that was ocular Proof to its Co-temporaries, to us is no more than uncertain Hearsay. A vast Disparity and Diminution of the Authority; but such as must necessarily be the Consequence of all Evidence when once it comes to be reported. It were indeed impossible in Nature to have given them such a Kind of Evidence as they could transfer, with any Degree of equal Weight, even to their most immediate Successors, and much less to us now so far removed. That *Seeing* indeed *is Believing*, has ever been allowed Reasoning; but that I am to believe a Thing because another says he saw it, and it is not in my Power to prove a Negative, and contradict him, is surely a very unprecedented and new sort of Logic. The Testimony of Sight is, by its Nature, an Evidence not to be communicated; all the Assurance in the World of another's seeing, can never have an equal Effect upon my Senses, or make me see a Thing where I was not actually present. The Light of Conviction therefore, which is thus received, can extend no farther than to the Eye-witness himself, lost and extinguished the first Moment it is offered to be imparted. Here then it commences human Authority, and, as such, becomes the proper Subject of our free Enquiry and Debate. It recurs in that Shape to the Province of Reasoning, and can now claim no longer to be treated with any other Deference than it shall appear from its own proper Merits to be entitled to. Now, whatever Degree of Credit it may, by this Means, in Time acquire in my Mind from strict Trial and Probation, this can surely never

And reduce their Authority to the Rate of common History.

be of itſelf that Kind of flagrant and inconteſtable Evidence which God expects ſhould work ſuch an inſtant Effect on our Minds, and be accepted by us at firſt Mention with ſo much Readineſs and Acquieſcence. The heſitating upon the Genuineneſs of a particular Tradition, can never be that Offence which God has profeſt himſelf to take ſo heinouſly at our Hands, as an Affront to his Perſonal Veracity, (with which it has no Connexion) and giving him the Lie. *He that believeth not God hath made him a Liar, becauſe he believeth not the Record that God gave of his Son.*

Muſt be ſome general Principle of ſaving Truth

And yet that there muſt be ſomewhere ſtill, we may be certain, (from the Conſideration of his reaſonable Nature who enjoined the Duty) *ſome general uniting Principle* in Being, which, if well attended to, will be a proper Foundation in all for this general Aſſent. That it cannot be human Reaſon, we have ſeen clearly on many Accounts, both from the natural Effects of Reaſon itſelf, and the known Methods by which Faith was firſt introduced. Perhaps then we have amongſt us ſome viſible Fountain of Truth, ſome univerſal Dictator aſſigned us upon the Spot, to whom we may all have Recourſe in our Doubts to be reſolved alike, and determined alike. Alas! the Evidence of ſuch a Qualification is but ſtill freſh Matter for Diſpute; the Authority of this aſſumed Character, and Claim of Infallible, muſt be grounded ſtill on ſome poſitive Warrant; and the Truth of ſuch a Pretenſion is again itſelf a new Queſtion, which can apply only to Reaſon for Deciſion, and muſt of conſequence be ſtill liable to all the Objections to our former Scheme, and to the ſame Variety of Perſuaſions about it. If the Spirit of Truth does not vouchſafe to appear in Perſon, we muſt ever have a Right to challenge his Commiſſioners.

Hitherto

Hitherto then, it ſeems, we are abſolutely at a Loſs for this general Standard and Principle, ſo much wanted, of univerſal Conviction. Have we no Proſpect left of making the Diſcovery? And how then ſhall we reconcile the eminent Reaſon and Equity of our Law-giver, with the giving us thus a Command which (if there be yet no farther Expedient remaining beyond the Uſe of Reaſon) we muſt many of us neceſſarily diſobey. For ſo it is—The God of Juſtice has aſſured us, both from our natural Idea of him, and his own poſitive Word, that he will require no more of any of his Creatures, than what he has given them Ability to perform.—The God of Truth has peremptorily required of us all the Belief of his Goſpel under a Penalty denounced, of no leſs than Damnation.——The neceſſary Conſequence is, that it muſt be our own Fault if we do not believe it; that it is in our Power to obey him if we will.

And how ſhall we then ſay?

One ſhould indeed imagine, that all the numerous and glaring Abſurdities that follow ſo manifeſtly from the firſt View of the forementioned reaſoning Scheme, ſhould have ſent Men naturally to look out elſewhere for ſome more ſatisfactory Account, and better Ground to fix upon in this important Point. But much more ſtrange is it to my Apprehenſion, that any Man who has ever looked into the ſacred Writings to be reſolved, the authentic Oracles from which alone all our Intelligence of that Kind can be drawn, could poſſibly overlook it, and miſtake the Rule there ſo plainly delineated to our Hands. There we find laid down, in the firſt Place, in the ſtrongeſt Terms, the negative Preliminary I have been advancing, and Reaſon ever intirely excluded the Queſtion. We are there expreſly aſſured,

that no Man ever attained to the Belief of revealed Truths by the Strength or Assistance of his natural Faculties, as we have at once from the same Authority the farther positive Instruction communicated, and the true Principle assigned us. Which was

The third Article I proposed mentioning, and which we have in one plain Word thus fully set forth to us, *No Man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.* Here is pointed out to us at once that great Dictator and infallible Guide we have been seeking for, and indeed the only Character we can possibly think of any way equal to such a Province. It could be nothing less than Omniscience and Omnipresence itself, nothing but this inexhaustible Fountain of all Truth that could be sufficient to such a Demand. And he it is, the promised Oracle, who *is to attend the Charge of Believers to the End of the World*, to keep alive his divine Light constantly in their Hearts; not to teach them Rudiments of Logic, but to irradiate their Souls at once with a thorough Conviction, and perform more by one secret Whisper, than a thousand clamorous Harangues from the Schools. From the Satisfaction consequent to the Mind from his Performance of this great Office it is, that he is so eminently stiled *The Comforter*, as his Operations are in another Place very strongly and significantly termed *the Power of God unto Salvation.* ——*He that believeth on the Son of God hath the Witness in himself.* In this Sense it is, that we are properly stiled *the Temples of the Holy Ghost*, the consecrated Scenes of his constant Residence, there ever personally present, and dispensing his certain Intelligence to the Soul, which the Apostle calls the *Witnessing of the Spirit with our Spirit.* It were endless to recount all the innumerable

What it is.

Passages

Paſſages throughout the whole Scripture that concur in aſcertaining this ſame ſuper-natural and all-ſufficient Source and Origin of our Faith, in Oppoſition to all the feeble Aids, and uncertain Advices, that Reaſon might poſſibly contribute to the Purpoſe. For we may obſerve, in mentioning the Principle of Faith, that we are always informed together both what it is, and what it is not: *By Grace ye are ſaved, through Faith, and that not of yourſelves, it is the Gift of God. No Man can come unto me,* ſays Chriſt, *except it be given him of my Father.* The Motive which induces Men to receive the myſterious Truths of the Goſpel, is the peculiar Grant and Munificence of Heaven, over and above the common Privileges of our Nature. It ſeems by the particular Negatives every where ſo induſtriouſly diſperſed through all the Expreſſions that treat of this Subject, that it was apprehended, that there might poſſibly happen, amongſt the unwary, ſome Miſtake upon the Occaſion; and that therefore, as it was an Article of ſo great Concern to have a juſt Notion of, the greateſt imaginable Care was taken, by the moſt preciſe and emphatical Terms that could be deviſed, purpoſely to guard againſt any ſuch fatal Conſequence. But the ſtrongeſt Confirmation of all theſe poſitive and repeated Revelations in the Point, the plaineſt Declaration and Direction what Kind of Evidence Chriſtians were always to truſt to and rely on for the Information and Aſſurance of their Minds, we may find ſummed up in brief in their Maſter's laſt Inſtructions at parting. *The Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he ſhall teſtify of me.* As we have both the ſame Perſon and Commiſſion elſewhere again ſpecified; *The Spirit, whom I ſhall ſend, ſhall lead you into all Truth.* But, not to ſtand for ever

tranſcribing

tranſcribing Particulars, I refer you once more to the great Original, which will, I think, readily ſave us both all farther Trouble in Quotations and Comments, and abundantly evince, in Oppoſition to all the evaſive Conſtructions which may be impoſed on particular Paſſages, that he was in general *to inſpire Conviction*, as well as Holineſs, and *to illuminate*, as well as ſanctify, our Hearts.

Now this Suppoſition, once ſuggeſted, let us, for a farther Trial and Confirmation, take a ſhort View of Religion in the Light I have been repreſenting it, of Inſpiration and infuſed Evidence, and we ſhall readily find, that this Principle alone fully anſwers all the Ends propoſed; that it concurs in every Particular with what we muſt naturally expect from ſuch an Aſſiſtant, and has indeed all thoſe requiſite Qualities which Reaſon ſo manifeſtly wanted for the Office. It is, in the firſt Place, *Univerſal*; *That Grace which bringeth Salvation hath appeared unto all Men: This is the Light which lighteth every Man that cometh into the World*; the uniting Principle, that ſpeaks the ſame Thing to all. Thus *inſtructed all alike*, Men may be brought to *think all alike*, which could never, as I have ſhewed, have poſſibly been affected by any other Means. This, again, is *of Authority and Force ſufficient to countermand effectually againſt the moſt violent Aſſaults of Temptation*, as it is itſelf of equal Certainty with any Gratifications they can poſſibly propoſe. Since here is Feeling oppoſed to Feeling, Knowledge to ſet againſt Appetite, and a ſtrong and palpable internal Senſe to balance all the Motions of the internal. — Above all, it is *of immediate Influence*, and operates without Delay. Such was the happy Metamorphoſis of an officious Perſecutor, into as zealous an Apoſtle. A Converſion

Anſwers exactly all the Purpoſes of religious Faith.

Is of univerſal Influence.

Of proper Weight.

Of inſtant Effect.

verſion effected not by the Force of dilatory Inferences and Concluſions, but by *an irreſiſtible Light from Heaven*, that flaſhed Conviction in a Moment. Thus called, we *make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from Day to Day*, our Faith is completed in an Inſtant, and the moſt perfect and finiſhed Creed produced at once, without the hazardous Attendance to be paid to any tedious Progreſs in Deductions of our own, or the capricious Adjournments of a factious and cavilling Council. By this Means all the neceſſary Articles are brought home ſafely at once to our own Breaſts, and the enlightned Diſciple breaks forth abruptly into this full and ample Confeſſion, *Rabbi, thou art Chriſt, thou art the Son of God.* This is that *ſtill, ſmall Voice* that beſpeaks the immediate Preſence of the Divinity, and makes its Dictates, as it were, ſelf-evident to the Mind where it is lodged. In this the Sum and Subſtance of all Argumentation is briefly comprized, the very Spirit and Extract of all convicting Power, of a Nature, perhaps, but little differing from that of Intuition itſelf. And can there be for Minds, thus inſtructed, any Occaſion to concern themſelves afterwards in unravelling any of the vain Subtleties and Conceits of Caſuiſtry in the Point, or to apply to Libraries for a more competent Information and Diſcovery? What is there after this remaining in human Wit, or theſe ſuſpicious Repoſitories of human Teſtimony that can now deſerve our leaſt Notice, or be thought of Conſequence to engage a Moment's Attention upon this Subject? Here we have already God witneſſing for God, and ſpeaking for himſelf, and *what Need have we of farther Witneſſes, who have heard*, as we may ſay, *from his own Mouth?* No; we ſtand no longer now in Need of any of the Credit of ancient Miracles, *Of abſolute Certainty.*

or

or the Genuineneſs of diſtant Records, a very ſlender and inſufficient Ground, as I have ſhewn, to anſwer all the great Purpoſes, and inſure all the rigid Demands of Religion. We can vouch, in its Stead, a preſent and a ſtanding Miracle of our own, an Evidence that ſupports all the ſame original Authenticneſs which it carried with it in Ages ſo far remote, this living Witneſs and uncorrupt Commentator in our own Breaſts, ſurviving all Changes and Succeſſions, and equally co-temporary with every one of us. It is our Security, that *he has writ his Law in our Hearts*. The indelible Characters ſtamped upon thoſe living Tablets are ſuch as are out of the Power of the Unfaithfulneſs or Ignorance of Tranſcribers to falſify or pervert. Such as no Miſrepreſentations can ever poſſibly intervene to corrupt, no ſucceeding Suggeſtions of a different Style to diſpute the Preference, or ſhake its Authority in our Minds by any new Appearance. And, for the utter Excluſion of all future Encroachments of the Kind, our faithful Monitor and Guardian has promiſed to continue this Office, and *abide with us* himſelf (as long as our Faith is expected to laſt) *to the End of the World*, that we might not be left liable one Moment to a Poſſibility of Error and Impoſition, which muſt unavoidably be the Caſe, if we were ever left to take any the leaſt Part of our Inſtructions from one another. Now, what a very different Proſpect this, and Ground of Security from the empty Notion of mere *manuſcript* Authorities and *Paper-Revelations?* Compoſed thus of periſhable Materials, the Original itſelf, though penned like that on Mount *Sinai* by the very Finger of God himſelf, and engraven even on Adamant inſtead of *Marble*, muſt in Time come to want *Repairs*; as for the preſent, it would neceſſarily require to

be

be multiplied by *Tranſcripts* for immediate Communication. The very firſt Step therefore from this genuine Palladium into a *Copy* and Repreſentation *at ſecond Hand*, will, (like the Tradition of a Miracle) detract in a great Degree from its divine Authority, as this muſt neceſſarily be *the Work of Man*, and liable of Courſe, from a thouſand Cauſes, to fall ſhort and deviate from its great Exemplar. The Oppoſers of the Goſpel ſay, indeed, that this is the Caſe; and inſiſt ſtrongly, that the ſacred Text has been actually much adulterated. With Regard to the Truth of their Aſſertion, and how that Fact ſtands, I will not take upon me at preſent to determine: But this, at leaſt, I will venture to aſſert in my Turn, that ſo far from reſting the Terms of our Salvation upon a Writing that muſt run the common Hazards of all other Memorials of the kind, that even though a conſtant Miracle were to interpoſe upon the Occaſion to exempt this important Charge in particular from all theſe *Changes and Chances* incident to all other Compoſitions; though the ſame Almighty Power that firſt indited were to continue hovering perpetually with a Guardian Hand over the ſacred Depoſitum, and the conſtant Inſpection of an immediate Providence concern'd to reviſe and keep it up in all its original Purity; — with all theſe eſpecial Privileges ſuppoſed, it were ſtill abſolutely defective and inſufficient for any ſuch revealing Purpoſe as they would expect. The plaineſt Terms, in the plaineſt Characters that could poſſibly be deviſed (and who will ſay that this is our preſent Caſe with Regard to the Scriptures?) were at the beſt but the putting a dead Letter into our Hands, without the additional Grace of this active Interpreter to attend it. That the Proofs of every neceſſary Article

Such as Books could never furniſh.

are

are certainly here to be traced is not Circumſtance ſufficient, if any Thing be left in the mean Time to the Skill of the Workman. *The Trial of the Witneſſes*, for Inſtance, is, without Doubt, a very noble and convincing Demonſtration, as it is managed, of that important Point of our Lord's Reſurrection: I ſay as it ſtands now collected and reduced by that able Hand, to complete Mood and Figure for our ready Obſervation. But the extracting and ranging it thus advantageouſly, is by no Means the Province of all thoſe whom that Leſſon may concern, and who would have been but very ill provided with a proper Repreſentation of that Matter, if they had known no other Means of conducting that Argument through all its Connexions in its fulleſt Force; if they had been conſcious of no nearer and more opportune Recourſe the while for their Satisfaction, long before ever this voluntary Apoſtle was pleaſed to engage in their Aſſiſtance, and *aroſe a Maſter in* Iſrael.

If either our own, or our borrowed Conſtructions upon holy Writ, were our only Means for *working out* the Knowledge of *our Salvation*, we might, I think, venture even to exceed the Apoſtle's Strain, in expreſſing the Deplorableneſs of our Situation, and aſſert, with the greateſt Juſtice, that *we were of all Creatures the moſt miſerable*. If a juſt Apprehenſion of the Authority and Senſe of the Scriptures be neceſſary for us to attain by Reaſoning, ſo is in the firſt Place, it muſt be granted, a good Degree of natural Underſtanding for the Purpoſe; ſo is, again, a competent Proportion of Skill in Language and Science on the Occaſion; and of courſe, the Circumſtance of a favourable Fortune to furniſh the Opportunity of making ſuch Acquiſition; ſo is, farther, the Enſurance of a ſufficient Allotment of Years to labour

bour through the Employment. To ſtate properly its Merits, and clear its Meaning; to ſettle firſt the Canon, and then the Contents, is plainly enough a Taſk, that no leſs Qualifications can at all admit our Undertaking. If a Bible therefore be once neceſſary for this ſtrict and ſolemn Peruſal, 'tis eaſy to ſee, that ſo are other convenient Means of Information in great Abundance to give it both Light and Sanction; that ſo is *Prideaux*'s Connexions, for Inſtance, amongſt a thouſand other Volumes, to illuſtrate and ſupport it.

I have been very ſhort and reaſonable in the Computation of my Demands, that I might come the ſooner to remark upon the Conſequence, and aſk in a Word, to what Purpoſe all theſe extraordinary Ingredients of Senſe and Learning, and Leiſure, thus almoſt miraculouſly aſſembled together in our ſuppoſed Examiners? Why, to enable at laſt, one perhaps in ten thouſand, to form ſomething of a *plauſible Conjecture* upon the Subject, and very poſſibly (what the moſt ingenious Students, who have gone that Way to work, have often had the hard Lot to fall into) a damnable one.

But, to return to my Argument, purſuant to this my Explanation of the Nature of Faith, and the Means of attaining it, we may be now able to give ſome Account *how the Want of it comes to be ſuch a Crime*, and ſo ſevere a Penalty to be denounced againſt Unbelief, which upon no other Suppoſition we could poſſibly do. The univerſal Tender of this Conviction, however potent in its Influence, muſt yet depend greatly upon the proper Diſpoſition of our Minds to give it Reception for its Efficacy, and ſo far will give Place, and afford ample Matter for Trial and Probation, and become indeed a Teſt of our Obedience. Whereas

May make Infidelity criminal.

the

the arbitrary Determinations of Reaſon are well known to be Events entirely out of our Power, and conſequently to leave no ſuch Room for either our Merit or Offence. Hence, I ſay, can ariſe the only poſſible Connexion in Nature betwixt *Conſcience and Believing*, in every other Light the moſt ridiculous Jargon in the World. Human Invention cannot find an equal Image to expreſs the Abſurdity of an obedient or criminal Underſtanding. The ſeeing of Sounds, or hearing of Colours, are Illuſtrations far ſhort of the Nonſenſe of *Conſcience in Opinion* upon any other Principle. The commanding Men *to believe rationally*, commanding them to have their Reaſon ſatisfied, and this with threatned Imputation of Guilt and Infliction of Puniſhment, is ſuch a Scheme at firſt View, as no Pretence of Authority, human or divine, can command any Regard or Attention to, or indeed any Notice, but that of the Contempt due to Paradoxes, the moſt eminently impudent and ridiculous. On the other Hand, a rebellious Oppoſition of all the gracious Inſtances of the divine Spirit to enlighten our Hearts, the willful Repugnance to all his earneſt Solicitations to accept of his ſaving Truths, may they not as deſervedly expect all that ſo great an Injury calls for, or the Reſentment of ſo great a Perſonage can inflict? Here Diſbelieving and Guilt have *Meaning* again when put together, ſince the Compliance required is no longer than that of the *Underſtanding*, but of the *Will*, in its Nature free, and therefore accountable; and though we are not by any Means chargeable for the Effects of our Apprehenſion, yet there is no Reaſon but that we may be with all Juſtice called to the ſtricteſt Account for our Obſtinacy, Impiety and Perverſeneſs.

Hence again it is, that Schiſms and Hereſies are ſuch juſt Objects of our Wonder and Reſentment; which conſidered merely as different Opinions, and as the ſpeculative Reſults of different Underſtandings, have certainly nothing in them either ſo ſtrange or deteſtable, but are on the contrary, Conſequences extremely natural, and no more than what was to be expected on ſuch an Occaſion: *We beſeech you, Brethren*, ſays the Apoſtle, *that you all ſpeak the ſame Thing*;—— *that ye be all perfectly of the ſame Mind, and the ſame Judgment.* A ſtrange Requeſt this, 'till we come to conſider the Character and Doctrine of the Speaker, and the Means by which he deſired it ſhould be effected; which is explained to us in another Place, with the Repetition of the like Demand, *the God of all Conſolation grant you to be like-minded.*

From this Account alone of the Matter can we reconcile ourſelves conſiſtently to the ſudden Converſion of ſo many upon little or no ſeeming Evidence, and diſcover both why it was expected, and why accepted at their Hands. *Follow me*, ſays our Lord to *Matthew*, *and immediately he left all and followed him.* It would ſurely ſeem ſtrange, humanly conſidered, to ſee him deſerting thus precipitately a beneficial Employment for he knew not whom; which muſt be the Caſe, if we ſuppoſe the Summons directed to his Reaſon; if he was not affected at the ſame Criſis by ſome correſponding *Call within* to influence his Motions, and warrant his Prudence: For it is either likely, if *what he had ſeen* before had had that good Effect upon him, as to diſpoſe him to Diſcipleſhip, that he would have had the Merit of engaging voluntarily in the Service, without waiting for a particular Addreſs, or elſe that he would never have proved ſo obſequious

to it on a ſudden at the firſt Offer, as to comply at once, at the Loſs of his Livelihood for a Word's ſpeaking. In another Place it is recorded, and as a Diſciplefhip not ill received, that *many*, who it ſeems had never heard of him before, *believed on him readily for the Saying of the Woman.* A notable Foundation truly for Confidence and Conviction, and perhaps Martyrdom, without ſome internal Aſſiſtant of ſuperior Credit to ſecond and make good the light Intelligence. *O Fools, and ſlow to believe!* ——And all this can you imagine, only becauſe *theſe two* poor deluded Travellers, involv'd only in a national, and humanly ſpeaking, a very natural Miſ-apprehenſion with Regard to the Nature of their promis'd *Deliverance*, as having never had any Notion ſuggeſted to them of any Thing more dreadful to apprehend than *Slavery* and Subjection to their Enemies, or been trained to the Ambition of a Situation beyond that of their own *Canaan :* Becauſe Men, I ſay, under theſe Circumſtances, had not, by the Dint of a peculiar Sagacity of their own, and a ſingularly happy Turn of Thought, been able to trace out preciſely in their myſterious Records a ſpiritual and ſuffering Meſſiah and a *Propitiation for Sins*, in direct Oppoſition to the general Senſe of their Country on that Point, and all the authentic Determinations and Comments of their ableſt Doctors and Sanhedrims, who had been ſo long preparing them in the Expectation of a *triumphant Standard-Bearer* and a temporal one. Is it to be believed, that God would reproach any of his Creatures with a defective Intellect, when he was pleaſed to give them no better ? Rather, is it not very evident, that this Animadverſion is by no Means applicable to their Underſtandings, or any Charge of their being dull Scholars, but a ſevere Reprehenſion juſtly due to a rebellious

Refuſal

Refusal and Disclaim of profer'd Grace? A Mind prepared and susceptible of these Impressions, it was their Part to cultivate for the Admittance of this heavenly Guest: So reasonable and necessary a Recommendation this, that wherever this Disposition was known to be wanting, he would not be at any Pains in soliciting such, but gave them up instantly to the Hardness of their Hearts without Remedy, depriving them judicially even of the most common Advantages, and not permitting them those accidental Opportunities of seeing any of his Miracles, which might possibly have alarmed their stubborn Minds into a better State, and prompted a Desire of farther Instruction. *He did not many mighty Works there, because of their Unbelief*; which would have been the very Reason of his multiplying them, or some better Means, for their Reduction, if he had thought them Subjects the least deserving of his farther Care or Assistance. In such a Case, we might not unreasonably expect to see something more of the *long-Suffering* Character displayed in their Behalf; some more patient Degree of Attendance had, in all Probability, been indulged to a tardy Genius and innocent Scruples, if they had been the only Impediment; it might seem somewhat hard and severe to reprobate, by so short a Process, for Hesitation, those whom perhaps one additional Circumstance of Power shining upon them, had brought to a proper Temper and Obedience. We may well presume, that he who left the Bosom of his Father purely to give us this important Information, would never have so capriciously neglected an Errand that cost him thus dear to undertake; or have desisted from all Occasions to promote the gracious Scheme of our Salvation to the utmost, upon any other Account than that of our own experienced Unworthiness.

For the ſame Reaſon only it was, and for a proper Puniſhment upon the incredulous and ſtiff-necked *Jews*, that he was ſo particularly cautious of expoſing his Perſon after his Reſurrection to publick View; when his taking one Turn in the Market-Place might have ſpared both the painful Labours and Lives of ſo many holy Vouchers, who *periſhed* merely by *the Thing's being done in a Corner*. No; but if *they believe not* the inward Atteſtations of the Holy Spirit, neither ſhall they *be perſuaded by one's riſing from the Dead*. And therefore, *if ever our Goſpel be hid* it *is hid* deſervedly to *theſe* only that *are loſt*, and have already wilfully forfeited all Claim to farther Grace, or any repeated Inſtances of Perſuaſion. According to the ſame Account we find, wherever the outward Enforcements of the Goſpel did not ſucceed, this conſtant Explanation of its Want of Effect; *The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with Faith in them that heard it*.

It appears then that, by this revealed and Scripture Account of the Matter, all the difficult and ſurprizing Phænomena that occur in the Courſe of our Reflection, and Review of this Subject, are conſiſtently cleared and explained to our Satisfaction, that Men may be certainly this Way highly *culpable* before God and Man, for a Deficiency in Belief; that they may be as equitably obliged to an *immediate* Acknowledgment of the Truth; and that he who requires all this at their Hands, may be yet ſtrictly juſtifiable in *withdrawing his Light* from ſuch as chuſe to *ſit in Darkneſs*, and abſolutely refuſing the Continuance of all Means of Conviction to ſuch, as by their Ingratitude and Neglect had rendered themſelves unworthy of all farther Solicitation, and would, by their Infidelity of Spirit, render its

Opera-

Operations, if tried, of no Effect.—On the other Hand, leaving this Solution for a while out of the Queſtion, let us now turn the Tables, and take a ſhort View of our religious Perſuaſion in its Reverſe, and merely as it ſtands upon its own Bottom; let us contemplate for a Moment the Œconomy of our Faith in no other Light than what our Underſtanding will afford us for the Proſpect, and ſee what a venerable Figure it will make under ſuch a Repreſentation, and conſidered only in the Eye of ſtrict and unaſſiſted Reaſon. To take it as it naturally occurs, in its very firſt Step; for Inſtance, of Baptiſm. Can any Thing be more natural, upon hearing of a rational Faith, than to interrogate, with the greateſt Simplicity, after our Church-Catechiſm?—*Why then are Infants baptized, when by Reaſon of their tender Age they cannot* poſſibly pretend to know any Thing of the Matter? To repreſent this whole Proceeding juſtly, according to the Laws of Reaſon, would be to give a very injurious Image of that heavenly Myſtery. For they article, might the invidious Objector ſay, without knowing it, to believe they know not what; and this Act, which is properly no Act at all, is received as ſomething to all Intents and Purpoſes complete in itſelf, and compriſing the whole Sum and Extent of a juſt Perſuaſion. Their living longer afterwards, to be capable of being informed *what it is* they have promiſed to believe, may poſſibly endanger, but cannot add to the Terms of their contracted Happineſs. The Merits of the moſt finiſhed Conviction are already theirs by Imputation; their Claim to Heaven ſtands already allowed, and Millions are accordingly, we know, actually ſaved upon the Strength of the mere Ceremony, without ever having had the Capacity of exerting one ſingle Thought upon that, or any other Subject.

The Conſtitution of Religion can bear no other View.

Inſtance in Baptiſm.

So far are they all the while from knowing any thing *Why*, that they do not ſo much as know *What* they believe, or, indeed, that they do believe any thing at all.—I could well enlarge, if Occaſion were, upon this Head, and reduce the whole Syſtem, by each particular Article, to that uncouth Image, which through the falſe Medium of Reaſon, it muſt ever ſtrike upon our Senſes. But if you will conſult the great Lord * *Bacon* upon the Subject, you will find the Application of this Teſt of Reaſon to Religion fully made already to your Hands, and carried with one continued Series and Air of Repugnancies through almoſt all the Myſteries of the Goſpel. And yet no one will, I believe, offer to doubt his perſonal Perſuaſion of the Truth of them, on Account of the ſeeming Contrarieties he has there ſet to view, whilſt he was ſcanning them by the inadequate Scale of mere human Reaſon. He knew well that all theſe Abſurdities, as they appear to us, were ſo far from being Matter of any juſt Jealouſy, or Exception to its Veracity, that they are the ſtrongeſt Preſumptions poſſible in its Favour, and the neceſſary Conſequences of our attempting of ourſelves to pronounce at all upon divine Subjects, that its not proving correſpondent to, or reconcileable with, our Notions, is a Circumſtance rather violently declarative of its being in Truth the genuine and undoubted Repreſentation of his Will, who *thinketh not as Man thinketh.*

There cannot indeed be on Earth two Things more widely differing, than this ſame Religion humanly conſidered, and falling under the proper Cognizance of this ſupernatural and inſpired Senſe, when it is attempted to be weighed in the unequal Scales of human Reaſon, and when it

* *See his* Religious Paradoxes.

has

has its just Poize by being proved in *the Balance of the Sanctuary. With Men this is impossible, but with God all Things are possible*, is a Distinction no where more strongly exemplified than in this Subject: By his Almighty Influence, *the Faith of Grace* shall give us Demonstration of Things in a thousand Instances, to which *the Faith of Reason* could never have, in any Degree, reconciled us. They clash in their very first Principles, their very first Lessons are the most direct Contradictions to each other: The Foundation of Philosophy is all Doubt and Suspicion, as the Foundation of Religion is all Acquiescence and Belief. But how extremely distinct and opposite they are in their Natures and Interests, we may judge yet more certainly from their constant experienced Effects, by observing that there never was, in Fact, any right Understanding or Correspondence betwixt their several Professors; that from the very earliest Accounts, they have ran naturally into separate Parties, have manifested, on all Occasions, a hostile Disposition, and mutual Antipathy, and stood ever, in the most distant Remove, from all Possibility of amicable Terms and Reconcilement. The Philosopher insolently scoffing the Believer, and he in his Turn, as zealously proscribing the Philosopher. *The Wisdom of Man* has ever been reputed *Foolishness with God* and his Servants, and but too often the Censure has been (however vainly) retorted. A fresh Instance of the Truth of that general Doctrine which I am endeavouring through the whole to inculcate! For if this Christian System had proceeded on rational Principles, it could never certainly have laboured under all that Contempt in the Eyes of the letter'd World which it did, and which the Ministers of its Propagation were beforehand expressly assured it would do. It had

The Cultivation of Faith and Reasoning produce contrary Effects.

all the Advantage of coming on the Stage, at a Time of Day when Reaſon was in the higheſt Requeſt and Reputation, and was ſure to have the faireſt Play imaginable: Never were her Friends, the profeſt Searchers for Truth, more countenanced and encouraged: The World had never Ears more open; nor was ever better diſpoſed to attend the canvaſſing Things by Argument, if that had been the Ground they had gone upon. It was then, by their own Confeſſion, the general Turn and common Employment amongſt Mankind, to be induſtriouſly *looking out for Intelligence:* The Improvement of their Knowledge was that to which they had devoted all their Thoughts; it was the undeviating Buſineſs of their whole Lives earneſtly to cultivate Information by all poſſible Methods; and they had ſucceeded accordingly in their Proficieney, and theſe *Children of this World were in their Generation*, at leaſt, as *wiſe as the Children of Light*. This was the Situation in which they profeſs to have found the Audience they were to addreſs, and a moſt advantageous and favourable one it was as could be wiſhed, if they had dealt in Arguments, and had human Means of Conviction to produce. But it ſeems they were *not ſo to learn Chriſt*, and that Religion and Science were, as I contend, two very remote and different Subjects. How frequent is it, accordingly, to obſerve the Effects of the Spirit operating with the greateſt Energy and Succeſs, in Objects where, to our Perception, a very ordinary Degree of intellectual Improvement is ſcarce diſcoverable; how much true Zeal, and Acuteneſs of ſpiritual Diſcernment, ſhining forth in Breaſts unadvantaged with the minuteſt Portion of human Talents, or Acquirement? On the other Hand, is any Thing again more common, than to meet with the brigheſt

Votaries

Votaries of the rational Claſs, deſtitute of every Glimpſe of ſaving Knowledge, or the leaſt Notion of ſuch a Thing as divine Faith? *The World by Wiſdom knows not God.* Nay ſo neceſſarily oppoſite are theſe two Species of Men, that their very Qualifications on both Sides are ſo many mutual and inſuperable Impediments in their Way, to hinder even all Poſſibility of any Approach or Accommodation. The religious Man, for Inſtance, the enlightened Diſciple of the Croſs, who feels within all that glorious Diſplay of the Power deſcribed, and all that demonſtrative Aſſurance of the Truth of a Belief, by which his Salvation ſtands enſured, is conſcious that he is poſſeſſed already of the *one Thing neceſſary*, and therefore contemns very juſtly all meaner Purſuits, which might poſſibly in any Meaſure divert his Mind from intending with all it's Powers the only Science deſerving of his Application or Regard. On the other hand, the Character of the Philoſopher diſqualifies him again as much, for the having his Mind open to Influences, of which he has not the leaſt Conception or Eſteem; the habitual Turn of his Thoughts, his contracted Fondneſs for regular Argument, and inviolable Attachment to certain eſtabliſhed Teſts, will, of courſe, prevent his being ever affected by any thing that offers in any other Shape. His very Progreſs in *carnal Wiſdom* has, we ſhall find, been but ſo much going backward in the School of Chriſt, on Account of which Effect, the Apoſtle ſo juſtly terms it, *earthly*, *ſenſual*, *deviliſh*. Thus prepoſſeſt, he will hear of nothing that does not juſt happen to fall in exactly with what he vainly affects to call the *Laws of Nature*, which he has already irreverſibly determined in his own Mind, and which engroſs all his Devotion. Moral Relations are with him the general Touchſtone for

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the Trial of all Truths that come in his Way; and Revelation itſelf ſtands or falls in his Opinion, only ſo far as it agrees with that pre-conceiv'd Standard. So that you ſee, *a ſubtile Spirit and a penetrating Genius*, as you ſo ſententiouſly affected to expreſs yourſelf, *may poſſibly blind a Man* in ſome Particulars, without all that Degree of Paradox which you would fix on ſuch a Suppoſition.

So much did the impotent Policy of that deluded Apoſtate *Julian* miſtake its Aim, when, in the Malice of his Heart, he prohibited the Children of Chriſtians from the Advantages, as he conceived it, of a School-Education, and being trained in Leſſons of Philoſophy, which, inſtead of contributing, as he weakly apprehended, to the forwarding of that Intereſt, and rendering their Qualifications more formidable, might, in all Probability, have produced often the ſame fatal Effects amongſt them, as it had done already on himſelf, and have diſpoſed them to give abſurdly the Preference to Paganiſm and Idolatry. A prudent Manager in his Place, that had well underſtood the Nature of his accurſed Project, would, in Proſecution of the ſame Scheme, have taken juſt contrary Meaſures, and ſpitefully ſet open the Schools every where for their Admiſſion; he would have earneſtly encouraged their retaining to the Profeſſion of Philoſophy, and invited them by all poſſible Arts and Privileges, to the Cultivation of a Science, that has generally been found to prove ſo deſtructive of their Principles. This had been proceeding judiciouſly however, and with Art as diabolical as the Deſign, by thoſe very Politicks, from which the Apoſtle very juſtly apprehended ſome Danger indeed, and againſt which his cautionary Precept is ſo ſolemnly and directly levell'd. *Beware leſt any Man ſpoil you through Philoſophy and vain Deceit, after the*

the Tradition of Men, after the Rudiments of the World and not after Chriſt. It had bid ſurely the faireſt for the Accompliſhment of his Purpoſe, that they ſhould have contracted early a Propenſity to Diſtruſt and Contradiction, that aſſuming and prying Turn of Philoſophers, which is ſo widely different from the Temper required to qualify a Candidate for the Diſcipleſhip of Chriſt. He has declared, that *no Man can receive the Goſpel, except he receive it as a little Child* in the Impotence and Impuberty of a dutiful Underſtanding; in the tractable Simplicity of unpractiſed Reaſon; not with the Claims of a ſelf-ſufficient Diſputant; the haughty and arrogant Spirit of a replying Academic; but with all the obſequious Submiſſion and humble Acquieſcence of a Babe, who has no other Diſpoſition, but *to learn his Leſſon.*

But for the ſtrongeſt Explanation of the Truth of what I am ſuggeſting, that *Reaſon* cannot poſſibly have any Thing to do upon theſe Occaſions, let me recommend you only for one Moment into ſome Aſſembly of the Faithful at their Devotions. Repair, I ſay, but to the next Scene of religious Worſhip, and contemplate there in your Mind what paſſes in your View, and the Nature of the Proceedings; a numerous Congregation, the Votaries of an extenſive Diſtrict, and their ſtrict Concurrence to the niceſt Punctilio in all the doctrinal Points there uttered, and bring me ingenuouſly your true Judgment upon the Matter. Is it poſſible that you will aſſert, that this harmonious Flock are thus altogether really giving a *rational Aſſent* to all theſe curious Articles, and profound Theorems, when your Experience, in the mean Time, aſſures you, that the Generality of theſe unanimous Confeſſors have never, in their whole Lives, beſtowed

Common ſtandard Creeds no Effect of private Reaſoning.

one ſingle Thought, in a ſpeculative Way, upon the Truth or Falſhood of that long Train of Propoſitions they ſo liberally avow? You muſt needs readily grant the contrary; and fall of Courſe into my eaſy Account of this ſtrange Proceeding, owning that it can be only the Effect of *the ſame Spirit*, that from the Lips of them all contrives to ſpeak *the ſame Thing*; that, by this Means, though Men cannot be all of one Opinion, they may of one Faith, which they hold, not in Unity of Underſtanding, but, as our Liturgy well expreſſes it, *in the Bond of Peace, and Unity of Spirit.* A Diſtinction that can alone juſtify the Conſiſtency of the Practice, which muſt be otherwiſe unavoidably liable to Reproach for its Abſurdity, and render its Abettors very deſervedly obnoxious to the Apoſtle's Cenſure of rearing Altars to *an unknown God.* A Diſtinction too which the ſame Apoſtle himſelf elſewhere allows, when he affirms of the Caſe of repeating Prayers in an unknown Tongue, that one *may pray with the Spirit*, though *not with the Underſtanding.* And what Wonder? when we conſider, that this ſame Spirit is the ſole Avenue of all theſe Intelligences; and that *it is not Fleſh and Blood that hath revealed this unto them*, but that they are all *taught of God*; that it is he only that hath *heard and learned of the Father that cometh to Chriſt.*—So then plainly it is no more of him that *thinketh*, or of him that *reaſoneth, but of God who ſheweth Mercy.*

I am indeed, after all, well aware, that you are not without your Precedents in this Perſuaſion; that there have been very ſtrenuous Advocates for your Side of the Queſtion, and thoſe too Perſons of no ordinary Eminence and Reputation, both for their Abilities and religious Attachments. I have, I muſt confeſs, been myſelf but too often a Witneſs to this Kind of Language from the Pulpit,

Pulpit. I have been often assured, from a strange Misapplication of a straggling Text, some faint Outline which seemed, they fancied, to countenance such a Notion, that " I was *to prove all* " *Things*, (a hopeful Task!) before I believed any " Thing. That I was not only left free to enquire, " if I pleased, into the Truth of all Fundamentals " in Religion, but that it was actually a Duty in- " cumbent upon me to do so, and a fatal and un- " pardonable Neglect to omit it. That I could " never answer it, either to God or myself, to be " any one's Disciple, without the Warrant of " that Reason he had given me to judge by, and " purposely to distinguish betwixt Truth and " Falshood. That it was, in short, a Qualification " indispensably required at my Hands, to be al- " ways able and ready to give an intelligible and " satisfactory Account of the Ground of my Faith " to any that should ask me the Question, and *a* " *Reason of the Hope that was in me.*

Error of Guides that recommend the reasoning Practice.

Now how well grounded this pompous Character is, we shall be best able to determine, by repairing once more to the great Original from whence they pretend to extract it, and date this wild and latitudinarian Commission. There we are told expressly, that *Faith is the Evidence of Things not seen.* A short and plain Definition enough, as one would apprehend. But these Men, by their Account make it only the *Evidence of Things seen:* They take upon them to reverse the authentic Precept, and bid us *walk by Sight* instead *of Faith*; whilst they are teaching us thus, that our Faith ought to be the Result of our own Reasonings, and telling their Saviour in Effects, with *Thomas*, that *seeing is believing.* And how such a Declaration may expect to be received, may be judged from the Manner of his Acceptance; " Thomas, *because thou hast seen, thou*

" *haſt believed.*" A very cold Reception of his difficult Humour and late Acknowledgment, intimating ſtrongly, that his Pretenſions to his Maſter's Favour diminiſhed in Proportion to the Degree of Evidence he had thought fit to require of him, that there was no mighty Merit in being convinced by Demonſtration, and when he could no longer poſſibly avoid it. And which was all ſtill more ſeverely expreſſed in the Beatitude, ſo ſignificantly ſubjoined and addreſſed obliquely elſewhere; *Bleſſed are they that have not ſeen, and yet have believed.* Theſe indeed were the Votaries, and this the Kind of Attachment which he may be always obſerved to have particularly encouraged and affected in his Followers. A forward Propenſity to aſſent without Lingring or Cavil, a modeſt and humble Diſpoſition to receive the Tender of his Doctrines rather as Matter of Inſtruction, than as the State of a Caſe ſubmitted to any Arbitration of our own, is the Temper Chriſtianity has ever required at our Hands, and graced, when diſcovered, with the conſtant Marks of its higheſt Approbation. If any Share of the Work appears to be ever at all put into our own Hands, if any Method of Trial may ſeem at any Time recommended to prepare the Way for ſuch an Acknowledgment, it will preſently be reconciled, when we conſider what are the Rules given us on theſe Occaſions; that they are not ſuch as can ever render the Conſequence of our Scrutiny precarious, or admit of any Poſſibility of a Miſtake on our Part. The Scripture-Teſt and Standard for finding out the Spirits of Truth is no more than this; —*Hereby ye ſhall know them. Every one that confeſſeth that Chriſt is come in the Fleſh, is of God.* Now this is evidently what Philoſophers call arguing in a Circle, and begging the Queſtion: But

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in Faith you see it is a necessary Preliminary; *He that cometh to Christ, must believe that he is.*

With what Severity does our Lord reprove the Sin of Infidelity in his Disciples, for imagining they were going to be drowned when their Vessel was actually sinking under them, and it had been from all Appearance a Sin against common Sense to have thought any otherwise? In like manner was *Zacharias* struck dumb on the Spot, for only hesitating upon what carried, according to the common Course of Nature, the highest Face of Impossibility. *Contrary to the whole Tenor of the Gospel.*

In what Particular is it that we find the Patriarch *Abraham* ever stiled with so just an Eminence *The Father of the Faithful*, and so much proposed to us at every Turn as the most laudable Pattern for our Imitation? Why because *against Hope*, i. e. contrary to all human Probability, *he believed in Hope, and considered not* (what one would imagine should have offered itself the first to his Consideration) all the natural Impediments that seemed to render the promised Event impracticable. But the Passage that most fully, and beyond all Possibility of Misconception, describes to us the true Nature of Faith in profest Opposition to that mistaken Notion of a rational one, which some had, it seems, erroneously entertained, is in the xth *Chap.* of the Epistle to the *Romans*, where the whole Question is discussed at large, and thus precisely determined: "*The Righteousness which is by Faith speaketh on* "*this wise*; *Say not in thy Heart, who shall ascend* "*up into Heaven? (that is to bring Christ down* "*from above) or who shall descend into the Deep?* "*(that is to bring up Christ again from the Dead.)*" You need not be at all this Pains to ransack Heaven and Earth for Intelligence and Satisfaction in the Point. *But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee,*

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even in thy Mouth, and in thy Heart; that is, the Word of Faith which we preach. For with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteouſneſs, &c. And this Deſcription, calculated profeſſedly for the Inſtruction, and ſetting right of ſome well-meaning Devotees, of whom he had teſtified juſt before, that *they had the Zeal of God, but not according to Knowledge*; and wanted only to be better informed. If my Argument could admit, after this, of any additional Confirmation, I might mention, from the ſame Authority, that Simplicity which the Apoſtle aſcertains elſewhere, as the proper Characteriſtic, and known Stamp of the Elect. *For you ſee your Calling, Brethren*, i. e. the Nature of your Religion, *how that not many wiſe Men after the Fleſh*, &c. And to ſecond this Obſervation by conſtant Experience, there are not wanting, through all Ages and Records, abundant Witneſſes, from *Origen* down to our own *Tillotſon*, what a Medley of a Character the Qualifications of Faith and a reaſoning Turn exhibit, whenever they happen to meet Both in the ſame Perſon. And how indeed ſhould we expect any other Conſequence from them, when we may obſerve, that Defences of religious Tenets, proceed in a quite different Style from that of any other Logic one meets with; that ſuch a kind of Reaſoning is avowed upon this Subject, as goes directly oppoſite to every other Species of Argument that carries the Name. Not to confine it barely to a *Credo quia impoſſibile eſt*, and the reſt of that Strain, which would have been conſider'd as no ordinary Degrees of Paradox and Enthuſiaſm, if advanced ſeriouſly upon any other Occaſion. Nay, ſo well and ſo generally is this Diſtinction and Diſſonance underſtood, that nothing can be more common than to hear it, upon this very Principle, urged every Day, againſt the

Study

Study of the Mathematicks in particular," that it was frequently found to have a Tendency to the creating an infidel Turn in the Mind, by diſpoſing it to a Diſregard for any other kind of Evidence, than ſuch as it was uſed to meet in that favourite Science. Whereas moſt religious Truths are ſo far from admitting of any ſuch Teſt, or giving into thoſe ſtrict Rules of Proof, that all officious Attempts of this Kind, to illuſtrate them at all by Argument, have been generally found to have little other Effect, than to obſcure and render them ſuſpected. Even upon the plaineſt Queſtion in Nature, the Exiſtence of a Deity itſelf, the Subject of the World, where all Men, as it is owned, muſt needs naturally believe, if left fairly to themſelves, and uninſtructed, may one not venture boldly to affirm, and that without the leſt invidious Inſinuation to the Diſadvantage of that extraordinary Perſon, that all the laboured Productions of Dr. *Clarke* himſelf (ingenious as they are) in that Behalf, have rather contributed to make for the other Side of the Queſtion, and raiſed a thouſand new Difficulties in the Reader's Mind, which would never elſe have occurred to him, where it has ſent away one ſingle Perſon thoroughly ſatisfied in the Point, or, indeed left him only in the ſame Degree of Perſuaſion it found him? And will any one declare ingenuouſly, that he finds himſelf as free from all little Doubts and Scruples, and, in effect, the ſame good and faſt Believer, after the deliberate Peruſal of theſe Arguments, as he was when he firſt took them in Hand? To ſay Truth, the very hearing theſe Subjects canvaſſed freely, though never ſo much to their Advantage in Point of Argument, is, in itſelf, a very dangerous Practice, and a great Weakening to all religious Attachments, which are eſtabliſhed on ſo much a better Ground. The

Religion will not admit of the leaſt Alliance with Reaſoning.

Corroborations of Reaſon, granting that they may be had, are ſo far from advantaging the Intereſts of this Cauſe, that they naturally tend to leſſen its Authority in Men's Minds, by debaſing it too much with a Mixture of our common Conceptions, and ſeeming to ſuggeſt that we owe ſomething of our divine Knowledge to the Aſſiſtance of human Means and Endeavours of our own. However it be, *the looking* preſumptuouſly *into the Ark of God*, whatever Light and Diſcoveries it may happen to ſtrike upon the Senſes, has certainly ever proved a fatal Curioſity; nor is there any Inſtance where the proverbial Effect of *Familiarity*, and intimate Acquaintance, has been more notoriouſly to be remarked. It has been made a Maxim in Reproach, by ſome forward Spirits, who were themſelves entirely ignorant of the true Principle, that an abſolute Unacquaintance with theſe Matters, was the moſt effectual Security for our inviolable Adherence to them, and that *Ignorance* was, in plain Terms, *the Mother of all Devotion*. And ſo far, in Fact, is certain, if we look but the leaſt into the Annals of our own Country, that there never has been ſeen leſs of Zeal and Steadineſs in the Cauſe of Religion, than at thoſe particular Junctures, when the Circumſtances of the Times neceſſarily led Men to the cloſeſt *Enquiry* into its Merits. How inconſiderable has the Liſt of Martyrs been always found, at the Teſt, in Compariſon with all thoſe who have made it their Principle to vary, without Scruple, every Way with the Eſtabliſhment; who have run readily into every Denomination of Religion by Turns; and ſeem'd to hold Chriſt's Church, to be always the Church in Being?

And accordingly it is obvious to common Experience, that ſuch Men as deal in Diſputes, and cultivate the Dialogue-Style in their Diſcuſſions,

are never half ſo fixed, and to be depended upon for their Principles, as thoſe who indulge conſtantly one ſame dictatorial Strain, and ſtick inviolably to one Side of the Queſtion.

As notorious it is to Obſervation (and it concerns you eſpecially to take good Notice of the Conſequence) that all the Efforts of this buſy Reaſon to refine off any fancied Droſs or Superfluity, which is imagined to have mixed in Religion, have generally proved deſtructive in the End to the raſh Adventurers; that they have found it to their Coſt too tender a Subject for ſuch rough handling, and a very difficult Point of Chymiſtry, to make the intended Separation, and that under the ſpecious Notion and Pretence of eradicating Prejudices, they have, in the Event, eradicated finally all Senſe of Devotion out of their Minds. The Conſequence generally attending the Attempt to weed out Errors, has been that, in ſtraining hard at the *Tares* of Superſtition, they have been too apt to rend up unawares all the cloſe-connected Roots and Seeds of Religion.

He that will allow me the Liberty of ſifting and controverting it at my Pleaſure, miſtakes the very main End and Deſign of Religion, which was calculated on Purpoſe to reſtrain and compoſe the turbulent Spirit of Diſſention, and to prevent wrangling. Religion, a pacific Inſtitution, abhors all Diſputes; not only as they call her Truth in Queſtion, but chiefly as they are apt to gender Strifes and Parties, of which ſhe, by a ſhort and eaſy Method, a general Rule of Faith, would fain make a general Comprehenſion. And if we ſubmitted, but as we ought, to this divine Information aſſigned us, and had the Obedience and Diſcretion to leave it ſolely to the proper Intelligencer, it would, no doubt, have the propoſed Effect, and we ſhould certainly ſee a bleſſed and

Inſtituted to prevent Controverſy.

heavenly Proſpect! all Men entirely of the ſame Mind. But the Miſchief is, Men will be officiouſly interfering, and imagining preſumptuouſly to lend their Hands to help out the Schemes of Omniſcience. And what better than our preſent Ignorance and Diviſion, can be expected from ſuch a Project? Inſtead of uſing with the Gratitude due the infallible Clue put into their Hands, they muſt be fondly making Experiments, whether they cannot contrive to find the Way themſelves without it. Now what a deſirable Eſtate ſuch a heavenly Principle might produce amongſt us, if permitted duly to engroſs our Attention, we may, in part, be able to conjecture, from the Effect which in our daily Notice reſults from an inferior Reſtraint of the Kind; wherever Reaſoning is watchfully and effectually ſuppreſs'd, even by the civil Authority, we ſee none of thoſe unhappy Diviſions and hateful Animoſities, which ariſe only from a fatal and ill-judged Indulgence to that reſtleſs Spirit of Contradiction and Confuſion. I am ſure there is no one Leſſon that the holy Writings have taken more Care to inculcate in the ſtrongeſt Terms, than this of denying our Reaſon to give our Faith Scope. Are we not ſtrictly enjoined to *captivate our Reaſon to the Obedience of Faith?* To *captivate*,—to lay it under the moſt abſolute Reſtraint and Prohibition, not to permit it the leaſt Opportunity or Freedom to exert itſelf, or interpoſe on any Occaſion whatever. Is not *carnal Wiſdom*, *viz.* the Reſult of human Reaſon, every where induſtriouſly decry'd in the Affair of believing? Is not Philoſophy at every Turn degraded and branded with the Name of Folly, to make Room for the more glorious Principle of Faith? And is it poſſible now that we can deſire any Thing more poſitive and expreſs for the Purpoſe to convince us, that this

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pure and divine Inſtitution (Myſteries that *Angels can be curious to look into)* was never meant to be made a Subject for the Challenges of Logicians, and for Schoolmen to play Prizes upon?

And nothing perhaps has ever more fatally betrayed the Cauſe of Religion, than the not ſufficiently attending to this one plain and important Truth, by which her Champions have been ſometimes inadvertently led to miſtake both their Weapons and their Ground, to forego their Advantage of an *Eminence, and the Hill Country*, and prepare a Defence for her, *upon the Level*, of which ſhe is no way capable. A Conduct which has not only given the Advantage on many Occaſions to her profeſt Enemies, but has deprived her, by its ſtrange Miſrepreſentations, of many who might, if properly introduced to her Acquaintance, have proved among the heartieſt of her Friends. For it is, I am too ſenſible, very much owing to thoſe falſe Rudiments, and the being unhappily taught and encouraged to allow themſelves in doubting at firſt, that ſo many contract that profane Humour of Scepticiſm, and are led raſhly to indulge a Habit which they can never afterwards get clear of; which I am afraid is too much at preſent your own Caſe.

From the prepoſterous Attempts of the ſame zealous Advocates, officious to reconcile theſe jarring Elements, and ſtraining at every Turn to find out by human Wit, in ſpite of the Nature of the Thing, plauſible Objects for Reaſon's Notice and Approbation, have ſprung all the various Denominations of Heretical Chimeras and Abſurdities, that have ever infeſted the Peace of Chriſt's Church with the Alarms of Faction and Controverſy.

In Purſuance of this Opinion, I cannot avoid regarding, as a very principal Cauſe of the pre-

ſent prevailing Diſpoſition and Turn to Infidelity, thoſe annual Inſtitutions of our great Philoſopher Mr. *Boyle*, in Favour of a *rational Religion*, by which he has attempted to ſquare the Subject of Faith to the Capacity of our Underſtandings, and account for our religious Profeſſions in the common Way of Argument, and by the narrow Rules and Meaſures of School-Diſputation. I mention this with the greater Regret, as I am very ſenſible it is a Conſequence of which he had himſelf no Apprehenſion, and which was the fartheſt from any Intention of his in the Eſtabliſhment. His Deſign was, no doubt, in itſelf, ſomething ſtrictly laudable and pious; but give me Leave yet to repeat it, that the Scheme has in the Event proved more radically injurious to the Cauſe of Piety, and more fatally inſtrumental in the unhinging of all religious Principles, than any that the Art or Malice of Religion's worſt Enemies could ever have deviſed. A ſtrong Inſtance of that irreconcileable Repugnance in their Natures betwixt Reaſon and Belief, of which we were before ſpeaking! when the greateſt Maſters in Knowledge and Addreſs, retained thus on Purpoſe to ſpeed this happy Coalition, can give, after all, no better Account of the Succeſs of their Negotiation, than that the Cauſe goes ſtill the backwarder for all their Labours, and that it is much eaſier to excite a Spirit of Enquiry, than to ſatisfy it!

Boyle's Lectures founded on this Miſtake.

Extremely prejudicial to Chriſtianity.

Nor is it, perhaps, any Thing very difficult for us to trace the Ground of this Miſtake, even with great Show of Apology, and whence this ſtrange Opinion of his in this Particular unfortunately ſprung. The raviſhed Votary had already experienced a vaſt Reach and Energy in human Reaſon to all other Purpoſes: He had exalted her, in his own Perſon, to ſo high a Degree

gree of Dignity and Reputation, and found her capacious Force on ſo many Occaſions, that it is no great Wonder, if his grateful Deference to his great Benefactreſs grew at laſt into Adoration itſelf, and led him even to idolize the fancied Diety. Hence he might come fondly to imagine that her Power was univerſal, and that there was no Object that could be too great for her extenſive Cognizance. A Compliment, how much too high for the Subject, and how abſurd in its Conſequences, will beſt appear, by the attending one Moment to the exact State of the Caſe theſe Preachers lay before us on the Occaſion, and the Terms in which it muſt generally be ſuppoſed to run in one of theſe Exhortations.

Abſurd Suppoſition of a Chriſtian's Examination of Chriſtianity.

" Brother Chriſtians, come hither and learn of " me to be Chriſtians; you that have been re- " ligiouſly devoted from your Infancy by your " baptiſmal Vow, and habitually trained all your " Lives, by your Education, in the Chriſtian " Faith, come now and let your Reaſon deter- " mine you into it. You that have been all your " Lives hitherto convinced of the heinous Crime " of Doubting, and the Neceſſity of believing al- " ways one holy Goſpel, in Oppoſition to all Im- " poſtures, come now and look with Indifference " into the Grounds on which this and all other " Belief ſtands; enter ingenuouſly into a fair " Compariſon of their ſeveral Merits, and uſe " your own Senſe freely and impartially upon the " Matter. We ſcorn to take Advantage of the " Prejudices of your Childhood, or to offer to " intrude any Thing implicitly upon your Un- " derſtandings, without conſulting firſt your own " Reaſon in the Point. In God's Name, judge " freely all of you for yourſelves; but then, be " ſure to judge all of you juſt as we do, or ex- " pect to ſtand to the Conſequence, &c."

This is, in ſo many Words, the true Subſtance of ſuch a Challenge. What a Medley of Inconſiſtency and Contradiction! For if, as is preſumed, I am indeed already happily engaged and fixed a baptized and habitual Believer, to what Purpoſe ſhould I be tempted, from my preſent ſecure Situation, to ſet out again afreſh in a new Shape upon this hazardous and uncertain Purſuit; where, if I fail, the Conſequence is fatal, and, if I ſucceed, my Labours are ſure to be at beſt but ſuperfluous? For what can Reaſon's Confirmation do for me here, but fix me where I am? and what can her Aſſiſtance give me in the Caſe more than I have already? And with what Freedom Reaſon will be exerted on ſuch an Occaſion, it is no difficult Matter to determine. When I know, from the very firſt Step, that there is a Hell on one Side of the Queſtion, it is but natural Prudence for me to take readily to the ſafeſt Side, as indeed it were the Height of Folly and Madneſs to keep a Debate on ſuch Terms long on Foot.

But what a Repreſentation is this of our great Lawgiver? and what a Mockery and Inſult upon Mankind? Who muſt be infatuated with Platonic Notions and abſtracted Paſſion for Truth, ever to think of venturing upon impartial and fair Deciſions, after ſuch Diſcoveries, and under ſuch Circumſtances. And for the mighty Privilege, ſo generouſly indulged us, Feedom is the greateſt Jeſt imaginable, when tender'd with the leaſt Air of Authority and Reſtriction. The leaſt Reſerve of Condition or Proviſo is enough to make void all Charters of philoſophical Liberty: And what then ſhall we ſay of a Grant, where the whole Tenor runs directly oppoſite to the Grace profeſſed, and whoſe very Terms themſelves, as laid down to us, abſolutely contradict the Subſtance of the Conceſſion?

At the ſame Time, the Preacher is ever triumphing in the peculiar Openneſs and honeſt Affability of his Cauſe, congratulating us perpetually on the particular Advantages of our happy Situation above that of all other Diſciples; whilſt, in a juſt Abhorrence of the Slavery of Popiſh Politicks, and deteſting the blind Obedience by them required, he nobly declares, that he will by no means *put out the Eyes of Men*, though certainly the only Method in Nature to make Men *ſee all alike*.

The Projectors they allude to were ſenſible enough of this Truth, and therefore boldly (but much more conſiſtently) center all their Difficulties in the one notable and fundamental one of Infallibility; which, it ſeems, they agree ſo far with me in their Account, as to confeſs, that nothing but the conſtant Attendance of the Spirit can enſure. In this only we differ, in the peculiar Sphere and Dominion of judging which they would aſſume and circumſcribe to one Set of Monopoliſts, in their attempting thus to confine the diffuſive Grant, and render the Catholic Church too particular: Never conſidering that this enlightening Grace hath appeared equally unto all; and therefore you certainly *take too much upon you, ye Sons of* Rome, *ſeeing that all the Lord's People are holy*.

But would any one imagine now, that after all theſe frank Permiſſions and boaſted Indulgencies, after all theſe high Elogiums in the Defence of Liberty and Recommendation of private Judgment, that theſe Exalters of Reaſon and all its Privileges, could ſtill actually intend, or hope in their Hearts, to keep a ſtrict Hand over us themſelves in all theſe licenſed Eſſays of our Underſtandings, that they could ſtill think of retaining our profound Attention and Deference to their own

They don't ſtill mean that we ſhould examine freely.

own Dictates, and expect that all our Attempts for Information ſhould be all the while under their Tuition and Direction? Could one believe that, with all this handſom Addreſs, theſe engaging Advocates for Freedom could indeed flatter themſelves with the Proſpect of any farther Influence over us, that they could propoſe in themſelves to have the inſpecting and regulating of this our *free Conduct* through every Step, and would hold us in the greateſt Abomination and Reſentment, for taking them fairly at their Word, and proteſting ever after againſt their Interpoſition and Authority? They, who by their very Profeſſion of being themſelves but the Pupils of Reaſon, have effectually given up all Ground for any ſuch Pretenſions, and can after this, perſiſt with no tolerable Grace in making the Demand. Actual *Infallibility*, as I juſt now remarked, is the only Title whereon to ground any plauſible Claim to our Diſcipleſhip, and ſuch a Qualification Reaſon will not pretend to furniſh. The Church of *Rome* confines, very judiciouſly, all the doctrinal Province of her Religion to ſuch only as have, ſhe inſiſts, the Advantage of an immediate Correſpondence with the holy Spirit; and then retails out their Diſcoveries again to the Simple on that unerring Foundation. Like true Empiricks, they flatter us with *Certainty* for our Dependance, and there's ſomething plauſible at leaſt we muſt acknowledge, upon the Face of ſuch a Profeſſion, to invite us to undergo the Experiment: But how to undertake it with any leſs Degree of Self-ſufficiency, is the Queſtion. The moſt ſuch a Solicitor can well ſay, when he offers his Service, is, that he will gueſs for us; which, one would think, ſhould not go very far in recommending the Uſe of his Aſſiſtance, or indeed in warrant-

Yet no ſetting up for Guides without Infallibility.

ing

ing his Presumptuousness in making the Offer. A cold Inducement for any absolue Confidence and Reliance to profess only a good Knack at Guessing! indeed, all the most specious Authority of the most learned and venerable Councils, without this Circumstance of actual Infallibility amongst them, is but slender Foundation still for such a Demand, and amounts, in Effect, to no more than the Proverbial Advantage, that *Two Heads are better than one.*

If I am to depend upon another for my Faith, and all its Consequences, it can be but a reasonable Demand on my Side to have an infallible Dictator. This is an indispensable Circumstance, that my Situation, at first View, gives me a Right to require at his Hands. If I accept of a Man like myself, to give a peremptory and magisterial Decision of Things in my Name, such an important one as (according to his own Account of *necessary Truths*, &c.) I risque my Soul to stand to, it is manifest enough my Deputy ought to assume at least the being himself a privileged Person, and out of the Reach of all Possibility of being deceived; nothing less can qualify him for undertaking the Office, or give me a proper Security under my Submission; as long as the Guides we employ are liable to be mistaken themselves, we can never have any sufficient Foundation or Insurance for our Dependance on a safe Conduct.

And farther, with what Face then can these very Men, who have thus patronized and seduced us first with so much Diligence to the Practice, whether by enticing us with the Promise of certain Conviction, or provoking us with their clamorous and perpetual Defiances, presume to lavish their Wrath afterwards, as they do, against the very Term of *Free-thinking*, encouraging

raging us with ſo much officious Zeal to the Uſe of the Means, and then condemning, with the ſame Vehemence, the neceſſary Effect of our Compliance. Here, again, how much more conſiſtent would it appear in theſe tyrannical Patrons of Liberty fairly to put on the honeſt Inquiſitor at once, who, to do them Juſtice, are not apt to ſet about Regulations of this Kind by Halves; where the Profeſſion of their Religion is concerned, theſe Paſtors have but one known Principle, which they conſtantly avow and abide by, by which Conduct, one can never be at a Loſs for the Conſequence of our Oppoſition, and muſt always be able to know, at leaſt beforehand, what one has to truſt to in diſſenting. They ſhut up, like faithful Monitors, all the Avenues of Error at the very firſt Step, and can never be charged (whatever other Complaints we may have againſt them) with having ever referred theſe penal Articles in any Part to any Deciſion of ours, or with telling us in one Breath, *you ſhall, and you ſhall not.* They do not throw Volumes of myſterious and profound Queries undecypher-ed into the Market-place for Opinion, and then expect that the good Company ſhall preſently agree about the Contents, and find themſelves diſpoſed to take it all juſt in the *ſame Senſe* that they would have them.

The Men of *Rome*, the moſt notorious of Idolaters, ſhall *riſe up in the Judgment* (of all conſidering Perſons) *againſt this Generation, and ſhall condemn it: For they* invented but the one Abſurdity of Infallibility, *and behold a greater* Abſurdity than Infallibility *is here.*

To give all Men Liberty to judge for themſelves, and to expect at the ſame Time that they ſhall be all of the Preacher's Mind, is ſuch a Scheme for Unanimity, as one would ſcarce imagine

imagine any one could be weak enough to deviſe in Speculation, and much leſs that any could ever be found hardy enough to avow and propoſe it to Practice. What? direct me firſt to conſult the beſt Advocates on both Sides of the Queſtion, and yet afterwards pretend to preſcribe which of them I ſhall be determined by? No ſurely; he that offers any Subject to my impartial Conſideration, *does not well to be angry* at whatever Deciſion happens to be the Reſult. His very leading me originally into this State of Enquiry, has fixed me at once independent of all future Juriſdiction to biaſs or reſtrain me, and obliged me now to ſtand to the neceſſary Conſequence of my Endeavours at all Events. He that has once ſet me to find out the Way for myſelf, muſt naturally expect me to take my own Courſe in the Proſecution of it; and can blame nobody but himſelf, if it be my Fortune to loſe it. So that if the Motives of the Credibility of Chriſtianity may be once innocently propoſed to Examination, they may poſſibly be innocently rejected too. Horrid Conſequence this! and yet but juſt. For the very making it a Queſtion, the very adviſing me to look into it to form a Judgment, both ſuppoſes and allows my Doubts for the Time.

Examining can't be under any Obedience.

What may be examined may be rejected.

Now, if Infidelity be indeed juſtifiable any one Moment of our Lives, who ſhall tell me what Moment it ceaſes to be ſo? Who ſhall take upon him to determine the critical Point, when longer Want of Conviction becomes criminal, or ſettle the competent Time we ought to be ſatisfied in? "O, ſays the Rationaliſt in Return, as long as "we are thus actually employed in the Search, "we may make ourſelves perfectly eaſy in that "Point; God will, on his Part, never certainly "expect more of us than he enables us to per-"form. A ſincere Deſire to know and do his

"Will

" Will muſt ſupply, till his good Time, the " Deficiency of the actual Knowledge.

So that, if we can diſbelieve (as they term it) with a ſafe Conſcience, we ſhall do as well without it, as with it. Excellent Account of the Neceſſity of a Doctrine, which God himſelf both did and ſuffered ſo much to introduce to us, and without whoſe *actual* Acknowledgment he has ſo often aſſured us our Offences againſt him can have *no Remiſſion.* If the Allowance of our own Conſcience be a ſufficient Security, it muſt be equally ſo under every Profeſſion ; and then farewel to the Notion of one only true and ſaving Faith, and all the conſequent Care to diſcover it. See here the conſtant and unavoidable Fate of every Syſtem that ſets out upon an Abſurdity ! We are firſt peremptorily aſſured that we ought *all to think right*, by our Reaſon ; and then, as a Salvo to qualify, or rather explain away ſo abſurd a Poſition, we are told with much Moderation in the Concluſion that we ought only *to think as well as we can.* A fair Acknowledgment indeed before-hand of the Poſſibility that Reaſoners may happen not to concur in their Reſolutions, and a very equitable Determination in their Behalf upon that Suppoſition ; but, as the Evidence of our Faith now ſtands, moſt profane and unwarrantable : Becauſe the ſincere Diſbelief of one ſingle Perſon were evidently incompatible with the very Nature and Currency of this our eſtabliſhed Law, an Aſſent to which is ſo peremptorily required, under the heavieſt Penalty, of all Perſons whatſoever, without any Kind of Reſervation or Diſtinction of Circumſtances ; which would never have been the Caſe, if any one could have been incapacitated, without any Default of his own for the giving ſuch an Aſſent.

Strang

Strange Paradox! that no one ſhould believe to pleaſe God, without having firſt aſked himſelf the Queſtion, " Whether his Son be not an Im- " poſtor? Rather, who knows if Grace may e- ver on any Terms be vouchſafed, after the hav- ing liſten'd to ſuch a Suggeſtion, or once harbour- ed ſo blaſphemous a Thought?

Advocates for Reaſoning vindicated, and explained in a proper Senſe.

But, to return to our reaſoning Preachers, I muſt indeed do the Generality of them the Juſtice to acknowledge, that whatever Miſtakes they may run into at their firſt Step, they recover themſelves again very handſomly in their more advanced Stages, and the maturer Courſe of their Proceedings; and notwithſtanding all their unauthorized Profeſſions of Liberty they ſo raſhly ſet out with, they generally take proper Care to remedy the Error very effectually before they have done; that we find them in the Iſſue much more conſiſtent than they ſeemed to promiſe, and the Latitude of the Text frequently reconciled and brought to bear, by the abundant Orthodoxy of the Comment. What they mean by inviting us to diſpute upon religious Subjects, ſhall appear at laſt to imply no more than this, that we are *to diſpute for, but not againſt them.* Now, in this Practice, it is certain enough there can be no Room to object any thing, either of Danger or Impiety. The Arguments propoſed are to be conſtantly all *on one Side*, and they are ready to *contend earneſtly*, provided none ſhall contradict them in earneſt. That this is indeed the utmoſt they mean to allow, is evident, when theſe very ſame Defenders of the Faith are every Day venting their loud Complaints againſt the Liberty of the Preſs. In which prudent Concern and Precaution, they ſeem however to have departed much from the Terms of their firſt Principle, and to teſtify plainly their Concurrence with me, that

Reaſon

Reaſon may chance to lead a Man wrong as well as right. And is not this Proteſt, the conſtant Burden of all their Reaſonings, the Appeal they are all ſo ready to make at every Turn to the ſecular Arm, all their loud Cries and popular Charges of affronting Eſtabliſhment, Innovation and flying in the Face of the Laws, *&c.* What are all theſe, I ſay, but ſo many plain and pregnant Intimations how unwilling they are to leave the whole Determination of theſe Affairs to the ſingle Force of argumentative Contentions? They conſider juſtly that all Oppoſition of Divine Truths, upon any Pretence whatever, is malignant *Hereſy*; and, believe me, they knew what they did, they underſtood the Nature of their Religion well, and conſulted her Intereſts wiſely, who have conſtantly committed to the Flames the Peſtilential Writings of Infidels, and their Perſons too, whenver it has been in their Power, as a Sacrifice due to the common Safety of Souls, and to prevent any dangerous Tendency from the Communication of ſuch Alarms. This, I ſay, has ever been the well-judged Practice amongſt the greater and more prudential Part of the Champions for Chriſtianity, however ſome daring Spirits of them have ventured unadviſedly to depart from the ſalutary Caution, and taken upon them, to the great Diſhonour often of the Advocate, and Prejudice of the Cauſe, to expoſe themſelves thus unneceſſarily to all the rude Attacks of ingenious Malice, to enter the Liſts unprivileged againſt private Reaſoners, and join Iſſue with them in their own Way. That ſuch Condeſcenſions to Methods and Laws, ſo foreign to the Subject, muſt ever prove fatal to Religion, is evident enough, if what I have been all this while advancing of its Nature and Evidence has indeed the leaſt Foundation or Support. And

If Religion were rational, they would not diſcourage Opponents.

amidſt

amidſt all the Rationaliſt's extravagant and chimerical Notions of I know not what ſtrict Juſtice in the Caſe, and an equal Indulgence due to the Advocates on both Sides, it is not, ſurely, to be ſeriouſly expected, even by his romantic ſelf, that the well-grounded Zeal of an enlightned Preacher of the Goſpel ſhould really permit him to countenance thus equitably in his own Defiance all the vain Pretenſions of theſe induſtrious Miniſters of Darkneſs in their Turn, and not rather laudably oppoſe to the utmoſt all Eſtabliſhment of blaſphemous Lectures againſt the Truth of Religion, and the erecting of common Pulpits and Privileges for Antichriſt, avowedly to communicate his Poiſon. All which, if Religion were indeed a rational Inſtitution, were, it muſt be confeſſed, no more than reaſonable Conceſſions, and the only Method for cultivating a proper Knowledge of her Pretenſions and Veracity.

In Oppoſition to the yet remaining Deference you may poſſibly ſtill think due to the united Teſtimony and Sanction of ſo many conſiderable Advocates, who are acknowledged to have patronized your Opinion in the Point, give me Leave, in my Turn, to produce too Abettors of no ordinary Character and Authority, as you muſt allow, in my Behalf. The civil magiſtrate, wherever the Goſpel has obtained, has ever taken upon him to inculcate, by all the Means in his Power, the ſame particular Belief, without leaving the leaſt Part of that Taſk for the Parties concerned to execute *for themſelves*. A plain and ſufficient Indication of their Senſe of theſe Matters, and that they were thoroughly ſatisfied in themſelves, that Reaſon was never deſigned to have any Share in the Office. And that ſuch Perſuaſion of theirs, and their conſequent Practices, were not without their ample

Magiſtrates would not take upon them to preſcribe it.

Ground, appears yet farther, from its being likewiſe the concurrent Senſe of our holy Church in Council aſſembled. We are taught, in our Liturgy, to pray, that God would give our Magiſtrates *Grace to maintain Truth*; which, ſurely, implies too a previous Grace already given to determine it. This Conſciouſneſs of their own inſpired Certainty, is the only juſtifiable Warrant that could be in Nature for ſuch a Proceeding. If there were the leaſt *Poſſibility* of their being *miſtaken* themſelves, they could never anſwer it in any Light to God or Man, thus to diſcourage or reſtrain their Fellows from Enquiries, ſo eſſential to their forming a Belief on any juſt Foundation. If God had made it the Duty of all Men (and the Magiſtrate himſelf amongſt the reſt) to diſcover his Truths by the Uſe of their Reaſon, nothing could juſtify the groſs Impiety and Tyranny of all Interpoſition to debar them of the freeſt Exerciſe of their own Faculties in an Intereſt that ſo highly concerned them, and a Truſt, for whoſe faithful Diſchage they might well expect to be called to the ſtricteſt Account. The Underſtanding, I ſay, of a Magiſtrate, has, naturally conſidered, no Show of Pre-eminence to plead above my own, whereon to ground any ſuch Claim to my Diſcipleſhip; if He drew his own Tenets from no better a Foundation than that of his own Reaſon, he can have no manner of Pretenſion to expect any implicit Deference from me, or to hinder me in my Turn of the ſame Liberty. It is far otherwiſe, if we will ſuppoſe, whenever we ſee him exerting ſuch an Authority, that our Prayers have taken Effect in his Behalf, and that he is ever prevented in his Choice, by the unerring Inſtructions of the holy Spirit. From no other Principle, doubtleſs, would theſe our *nurſing Fathers* take upon them to intereſt themſelves ſo far

far in the Sentiments of their Wards, as to tempt them into the right Way by profeſſed Bribes, and encourage the Faithful, by throwing the Conveniencies of Life into the Scale. The making it thus Mens temporal *Intereſt to be perſuaded* of one particular Way, would be an unſurmountable Obſtacle in the Way of all fair Examination, and for ever fatal to the Uſe of Reaſon, if ſhe were to be concerned. There could not, taking Things in that Light, be a more odious and flagrant Inſtance of abſurd Partiality, Cruelty and Oppreſſion, than the impoſing of any *preſcribed Opinions* as the Terms of Society; nor could Humanity juſtify, in any Degree, all thoſe wholeſom Severities with which they now ſecond the certain Awards of Heaven, but that they muſt appear to be moſt monſtrouſly wicked and unjuſt, if Reaſon were our appointed Guide, ſince it might then frequently happen that Men might incur the ſevereſt Puniſhments by the moſt innocent Conduct, and for Actions abſolutely out of their own Power.

To obſerve yet farther, in a lower, though not leſs important, Sphere amongſt all the authorized Inſtructors of our Youth in their Seminaries at the very Fountain-head, whence all our religious Notions are firſt diſpenſed and derived to us at our ſetting out in the World. Let us recollect one Moment with ourſelves, what were thoſe firſt Steps there taken with our unpractiſed Minds, what the *Methods* regularly employed in our academic Inſtitutions *to gain us over* to Chriſt's Flock, and the Conduct of our earlieſt Initiation into theſe holy Things. Was the Caſe then of Religion and its Fundamentals ever in earneſt fairly and fully *ſtated* to us, the beſt Champions on both Sides honeſtly and ingenuouſly recommended to our Peruſal and Conſide-

Nor Universities expect us ready formed in it.

ration, a competent Time allowed us to bring in our Determinations as the Evidence ſhould appear to us; and laſtly, Protection and Good-will at-leaſt aſſured to us, in caſe we ſhould, after all, happen to diſſent? No ſuch Matter. — On the contrary, was not our Country's Faith always ſuppoſed to be our own of Courſe? Was not the ſimpleſt Candidate for the firſt Rudiments of Science conſtantly called upon to ſubſcribe inſtantly to the whole Compliment of eſtabliſhed Faith without Heſitation, as the neceſſary and indiſpenſable Preliminary to his Introduction there, and preſumed to come fully qualified and ready prepared for that Purpoſe? Or ſhould any one, at this Criſis, take upon him to expreſs any thing like the leaſt Symptom of Diſſatisfaction in theſe Points, would it not, do you think, be very readily and pertinently demanded of him, "What "brought him thither?" and, once admitted, how impious was all After-reaſoning on theſe Matters ever repreſented to us? What Care to reſtrain us, by ſuppreſſing diligently all obnoxious Replies, from all Opportunities of conſulting above one Side of the Queſtion? What a juſt Abhorrence at all Times inculcated of having any Opinions properly our own, and unauthorized by the Liſt put into our Hands? Laſtly, What buſy, active Induſtry and Pains to ſtigmatize, on all Occaſions, any that ſhould preſume to ſtep aſide in the leaſt from the preſcribed Track, and avow their Doubts, to prevent their Influence and Infection? The Truth of this Particular you will, I fear, have ſoon Cauſe to know but too certainly from your own Experience, if you continue ſtill to perſiſt inconſiderately in your propoſed Purſuit, and retaining your preſent Perſuaſion of theſe Matters; which will lead you naturally to think, in the firſt Place, of calling in ſome other

Aſſiſt-

Assistance than your own upon the Subject, and of course to propose your Scruples freely, and without Reserve, to your Fellow-Pupils for their Judgment and Opinion. The Consequence of which Application will be as naturally the alarming them with Horror and Indignation at your innocent Questions. The professing yourself at all at a Loss for Truth in your Circumstances, will be adjudged immediately as an Act of the blackest Apostasy; and, as such, they will take hold, on all Occasions, to represent you in the most odious Colours they can frame, as one maliciously devoted to Infidelity, actually inlisted in the Devil's Service, and zealous for the Cause. They will diligently shun your Conversation, and detest and vilify your Person, by all which Treatment you will then, at your own severe Cost, come to understand too late, that *Questioning in Religion is denying*; and that all suspending one's Judgment, (though even in order to be better informed) is, in this Case, a professed and criminal Opposition. Whereas, were Religion indeed a rational Institution, a Man might surely well dispute it without a Crime: The Disputant could by no fair Conclusion be reputed an Adversary, and prosecuted with such sanguine and inveterate Marks of Hostility. A free and amicable Correspondence might well be admitted, and the wildest Opponent received upon an equal Foot with his most orthodox and approved Antagonist. All other Methods of Proceeding bespeak plainly the Question already determined beyond all Possibility of Controversy. And so indeed it is, by that unerring **Principle** which I have been pointing out. Thus instructed, we can consider it no longer as Matter of Speculation and Argument, or bear with Patience under any specious Pretences to have that Saviour which *we feel*, denied in Effect,

by being called in Queſtion. This prompts and authorizes all our juſt Zeal and Averſion on theſe Occaſions, and ſtamps that a laudable Cruſade and *holy War* againſt Infidels, which would elſe be no other than a wild and fooliſh Sally of blind Bigotry, the furious and mad Spirit of ſuperſtitious Phrenzy and Perſecution.

Nor Parents inſtruct their Children in it.

As highly partial and unjuſt would be, even in Parents themſelves, upon your Suppoſition, the officious Piety of what they call Education, which would then be nothing elſe but the *undue* Cultivation of the moſt notorious and palpable Prejudices. The anticipating thus unfairly the Strength of the ſuppoſed Evidence before it is produced to ſpeak for itſelf, the retaining them thus powerfully of a Party before the Means of Trial are put into their Hands, and all this with ſuch Artifices of Flattery and Terror, as muſt ſecure them effectually from all Poſſibility of ever recovering Truth, in Caſe they ſhould chance to be miſtaken, were a Practice ſo abſurd in itſelf, and ſo fatal in its Conſequences, if Men were to judge by their Reaſon, as inſtead of claiming our Gratitude for the Office, could admit of no Excuſe or Gloſs for the Injury. Nothing but their being infallibly aſſured themſelves that they cannot be miſtaken, and ſo miſlead their Charge (and therefore no Conviction founded on any human Authority) could be Warrant ſufficient for them to intrude thus peremptorily their own contracted Opinions upon their Children, at a Time of Day when they can have no poſſible Share themſelves in the Determinations they are adopting, and by which they muſt be prevented from ever forming any future Regulations of their own upon a better Foundation.

Hitherto what I have obſerved to you for the Confirmation and Support of its Authority, has run

run only upon the general Practice of my ſuppoſed Allies. I have traced their Opinions, as yet, only by their Conſequences; and many, perhaps, will be apt to think there can be ſcarce a ſtronger Proof. I have one, however, ſtill in Reſerve for your Conſideration, who is, I think, *in Words* as expreſs as can well be deſired, and ſpeaks out very ſufficiently upon the Occaſion; one who ſpeaks the whole of my Sentiments ſo ſtrongly and clearly for me, that I ſhould be wanting to the Cauſe I am ſeeking to explain and recommend, if I were to give you them in any other Terms than his own. The Oracle I mean is, Biſhop *Beveridge*; a Name, whoſe very Mention muſt ever carry its own Weight with it, without any ſuperfluous Encomiums in its Behalf. A Name that always has, and always will be heard with the greateſt Reverence and Regard, as long as true Piety and Chriſtianity have any remaining Footſteps in the World.

The natural Man receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God, for they are Fooliſhneſs unto him; neither can he know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually diſcerned. His Comment upon the foregoing Text runs thus; "Neither *can* he know them. "There is an abſolute Impoſſibility in it, that any "one, remaining in his natural Principles, with- "out the Aſſiſtance of God, ſhould apprehend, "or conceive, the Excellency of ſpiritual Objects. "So that a Man may as ſoon read the Letter of "the Scripture without Eyes, as underſtand the "Myſteries of the Goſpel without Grace.

Biſhop Beveridge's *Thoughts upon the Subject.*

If this ſhould not ſeem direct enough to the Point, what follows immediately after is, if poſſible, a ſtill ſtronger Deſcription, and fuller Account of the Matter.

"I believe it is a thouſand times eaſier for a "Worm, a Fly, or any other deſpicable Inſect

" whatſoever, to underſtand the Affairs of Men,
" than for the beſt of Men, in a *natural State*,
" *to apprehend the Things of God.* No, there is
" none can know God, nor, by Conſequence,
" any thing that is really good, but only ſo far
" as they are *Partakers of the divine Nature.* We
" muſt, in ſome Meaſure, be like to God, be-
" fore we can have any *true Conceptions* of him.—
" We muſt have a *ſpiritual Sight*, before we can
" behold ſpiritual Things. Which every natural
" Man being deſtitute of, *he can ſee no Comelineſs*
" *in Chriſt*, why he ſhould be deſired, nor any
" Amiableneſs in Religion, why it ſhould be em-
" braced.—And hence it is, that I believe the
" firſt Work which God puts forth upon the
" Soul, in order to *its Converſion*, is to raiſe up
" *a ſpiritual Light within it, to clear up its Ap-*
" *prehenſions about ſpiritual Matters.*"

In another Place, ſpeaking of the wonderful Effects of the Apoſtle's Preaching, he remarks thus: " Queſtionleſs, it was nothing elſe but *the* " *Spirit of the moſt high God*, that went along " with them, and accompanied the Word they " preached; otherwiſe, it *never could have made* " *ſuch deep Impreſſion* upon the Hearts of them " that heard it."

And laſtly, to ſum up the Force of all his Doctrine, as it were in one Word, he gives us in his own Perſon the livelieſt Inſtance of that *ſupernatural and perſuaſive Impulſe* he has been deſcribing, whoſe Operation he is repreſenting to our fulleſt View, whilſt it breaks forth from him, like *the dying Martyr*, in a triumphant Rapture, expreſſive of a Flood of Light juſt obtained, and an actual *Diſplay of the Beatific Viſion.* " And " now, ſays he, methinks I begin to perceive " this *divine Spirit is come upon me* too, and " ſeems, by its powerful Influence, to be work-

" ing

" ing up my Heart into a thorough *Perſuaſion*,
" that it is Chriſt, and Chriſt alone, I am to caſt
" my Soul upon.—Away then with your pagan-
" iſh Idolatries, your, *&c.*—It is the Chriſtian
" Religion alone that I am reſolved to live and
" die in."

What is all this, but the being evidently, in the Apoſtle's own Senſe, *enlightned, taſting of the heavenly Gift, and being made Partaker of the holy Ghoſt?*

I may, poſſibly, in the Haſte of my Zeal, have laid myſelf open to you unguardedly enough, through the Courſe and Proſecution of my Argument, and very conſiderably to my Diſadvantage in Point of ſtrict Criticiſm; but I will never imagine, that after all the Concern I have been all this while expreſſing for your particular Intereſt, I muſt be now to beſpeak your Candour, to court your Courteſy, and apply for a formal Indemnity for my Inadvertencies. Beſides that it is enough for my Deſign, if the main Drift and Scope of the Argument may be allowed to be upon the whole maintained only with ſome tolerable Degree of Propriety, ſo as to carry juſt the Face of ſomething plauſible and conſiſtent, and that may appear to deſerve your farther Attention. A critical Punctuality is by no Means my preſent Care, becauſe I do not conceive ſuch Exactneſs any Way material to the Purpoſe in Hand. I cannot apprehend that any ſagacious Diſcovery, that I have poſſibly miſtaken, or miſapplied any of thoſe particular Texts that happen'd to occur to my Memory upon this Occaſion (though I am far from being conſcious of having left the leaſt Room for any ſuch Charge) will at all avail to invalidate, and much leſs to overturn, what I have been endeavouring to eſtabliſh; the Foundation of which does, as I am perſuaded, by no Means depend

for

for its Support upon the bare Strength of any ſingle Quotation whatever, or indeed of any preciſe Number, but on the joint Tendency and Tenor of the whole.

I might, I think, even carry my Proteſt yet much farther upon this Head, and inſiſt that, though I had not really been able to have produced any of all theſe poſitive Authorities at all in my Favour, that though I had not been ſo ſucceſsful in extracting ſo very plauſible an Account of the Senſe of the holy Scriptures upon the Subject, and tracing their exact Concurrence with all that Clearneſs and Strength, which I flatter myſelf I have done; I might have well relied however, and with all Security, upon my previous Argument alone, that *it was impoſſible in the Nature of Things*, without offering to go any farther. For that once well eſtabliſhed, it ſeems almoſt ſuperfluous for one to go about to ſtrengthen Impoſſibilities ſo agreed, or enforce them from poſitive Matters of Fact, be their Authority never ſo ſacred and unconteſtable; and when once it has been already clearly proved, that ſuch a Thing *cannot be*, to continue proving on afterwards that the ſame Thing actually *is not*. If I have acquitted myſelf therefore beyond all Exception, in making good my firſt Ground, I might have ventured ſafely enough to abide by it, without having the leaſt Occaſion to look out for additional Confirmations from any foreign Voucher whatever. What I principally propoſed from the Experiment was, the carrying on my ſuppos'd *Detection of a falſe Principle*, to a ſatisfactory Concluſion in the *Diſcovery of a true one*; to take the Occaſion for the completing of my Deſign, by pointing out what was really and poſitively the authorized Principle of Faith, in Oppoſition to your miſtaken one; (the Intelligence

gence of which could proceed from Revelation only in the Point) and to ſhow at the ſame Time that my Aſſertion would ſtand the Teſt before Judges of all Denominations, and conſidered ſeparately, either in the View of Reaſon, or Scripture; as I am thoroughly perſuaded, that every Step you proceed in the Contemplation either of the one or the other, will help to ſecond my Obſervations, and improve in your Opinion thoſe few rude Hints which I have been able from a general View to ſuggeſt to you. Your own mature Reflection I readily truſt and acquieſce in. I know the Honeſty of your Nature will break out in Spite of the ſtrongeſt Prejudices you may have conceived; and that you will diſdain to be ſtraining and racking your Invention in ſo plain a Caſe, for Matter of mere Cavil and Evaſion, in Support of any favourite Notions whatever, againſt your better Judgment. If I thought you were ſo diſpoſed, I would recommend you freely to Dr. *Stillingfleet*'s *Origines Sacræ* for your Aſſiſtance; where, I aſſure you, you may be very plentifully ſupplied with all the abundant Gloſſes for the Purpoſe, that the greateſt Extent of human Learning and Abilities can be ſuppoſed capable of furniſhing.

Leaſt of all can I apprehend, that you will require, with *Nicodemus*, a critical and diſtinct Account of theſe Operations of the Spirit; and put me to the reminding you of the Anſwer given him upon the Occaſion, intimating, that he might very well reconcile himſelf to the Belief of *the Fact*, though his Curioſity ſhould not be fully gratified with ſo particular an Explanation of *the Manner*; that it was frequently the Caſe in the moſt natural Subjects, as appeared in that familiar Inſtance of *the Wind*, whoſe Effects are beyond all Contradiction palpable and obvious to the Perception

ception of our Senſes, without our being able the while to trace, in any adequate Degree, either *the Cauſe* or Courſe of its Operations.

Another profeſſed Illuſtration of this Subject, and which runs exactly in the ſame Spirit and Style with the former, we have thus delivered to us. *So is the Kingdom of God, as if a Man ſhould put Seed in the Earth, and ſhould ſleep, and riſe Night and Day, and the Seed ſhould ſpring, he knoweth not how.* However he may feel the Benefit of the Increaſe in the Harveſt of his Toils, the Progreſs and Method of its Advances ſhall ſtill be ſure to eſcape his niceſt Obſervation.

And for any Thing that may at the firſt Mention poſſibly found harſh or difficult to our Conceptions, in the Suppoſition of ſuch an Expedient, we need but to recollect that very lively Specimen and Taſte of it, which we have already experienced from the very firſt Manifeſtation of the *ſame divine Spirit*, in the Miracle of *the cloven Tongues*. A moſt expreſſive and emphatical Type of that analogous Miracle, which was then intended to be purſued through all ſucceeding Generations. Where *every Member of every Nation heard at the ſame Inſtant the ſame divine Leſſon adapted exactly to his own particular Capacity, addreſt to himſelf in Perſon, in his own proper Language, in the very Dialect moſt intelligible to him, and the Terms moſt ſuitable and familiar to his Apprehenſion.*

Once more, if we had indeed no *actual Inſtance* of the Kind to familiarize the Conſideration to us, is there even in *the Matter itſelf* upon Reflection, any Thing more extraordinary or wonderful to Thought, that this ſame Spirit ſhould thus miraculouſly *ſpeak to us* for our Inſtruction, than that he ſhould *ſpeak for us* in the ſame Manner, in the Midſt of popular Aſſemblies, for our Juſtification?

fication? What mighty Difference is there, I ſay, upon the Compariſon, but that he who has engaged thus ſtrongly to undertake and ſupport upon Emergencies the Defence of his perſecuted Servants, *without ſo much as a ſingle Thought or Suggeſtion of their own, by Way of Forecaſt*, who is to pronounce a regular Series of Arguments in their Cauſe, and diſcourſe extempore through their Organs, for their Vindication in a Court of Juſtice, may not as eaſily be conceived capable of dictating Sentiments in ſecret to our *Underſtandings*, as of prompting our *Lips* with Expreſſions of putting Belief into our Hearts, as Words into our Mouths, and giving us what *to think*, as what *to ſay?*

But whether any Thing I can offer thus of my own Suggeſtions, may appear of Force to reconcile it in any Meaſure to your preſent Notions, have ſhewn you already, from indiſputable Authority, that *ſo in Fact it is*; and ſome other Scheme than your rational one in the Caſe, you muſt, I think, by this Time ſee yourſelf obliged to have Recourſe to; upon the Suppoſition, I mean, that you muſt, upon Reflection, admit the Concluſiveneſs of all thoſe obvious Exceptions which I have been raiſing againſt the Poſſibility of it, and which it will, I hope, upon a ſhort Review, appear to be no ſuch immodeſt Preſumption to ſuppoſe. If I have, for Inſtance, ſhewn you that it is evident at firſt Sight *from the Nature of the Thing*, and every Conſideration of its known Properties and Effects, that *Reaſon can never poſſibly be that Principle which is to make all Men of one Mind.*—That ſuch Accompliſhments as require *Time and Parts to attain, can never be univerſally neceſſary*, and what a reaſonable Maſter can expect at our Hands.—That a proper Proviſion of Faith, both as a Qualification,

Recapitulation of the Argument.

on, and for its Influence, is *equally neceſſary at every Period of our Lives*, and conſequently, can never admit of our going through *a Courſe of Proofs*, though never ſo obvious, to give it Credit and Authority with us, but muſt needs be in itſelf a plain and authentic Map, *always at Hand*, to conſult every Step we proceed.—That *as our very Virtue depends entirely upon ſuch Belief, our Belief can never poſſibly depend upon our rational Conviction*, the Privilege only of a few Students and Speculatiſts—That even with regard to theſe moſt competent Judges, it is *impoſſible to conceive any the leaſt Connexion betwixt the Notion of Duty, and aſſenting rationally* to any Propoſition, however ſtrongly ſupported.—That *Arguments are properly but Motives* and Inducements *ſubmitted to our Underſtandings* for their Influence, and that, of Courſe, it can be little leſs than a Contradiction in Terms, to talk of our being *obliged to let them be concluſive*.—That wherever there is a Complication of Circumſtances to be determined upon, Conſequences to be regularly drawn, and a ſummoning of Evidence in the Caſe; wherever there are all theſe Preliminaries to be firſt gone through, *the Iſſue can never*, with any Certainty, *be foretold, and much leſs enjoin'd* and preſcrib'd.—That there is a vaſt and very eſſential Difference to be taken betwixt the being of a ſufficient Force to ſupport a ſtrong Appearance of moral Probability in the Nature of Things, and the Judgment of Men ſpeculatively diſpoſed, and the being ſufficiently calculated to *extort an Aſſent from every one* that hears it: Betwixt the Materials that may probably, on *due Conſideration had*, lead a *Locke* or *Newton* into the Perſuaſion, and thoſe that muſt have that uncontrollable Effect upon *all* that come within the Reach of their magnetic Impulſe,

as

as to compel a whole People *at once* into the Acknowledgment.—And that therefore, however plauſibly Chriſtianity may be enforced *as a Fact*, it can yet never be true, *as a Goſpel*, in Virtue of any Arguments deduced from Reaſoning.—That the giving *all Men Leave to determine* of the Goſpel as the Matter ſhall appear to *their Reaſon*, is, if it happen to appear otherwiſe than true, a Liberty entirely *deſtructive of the very Notion of a true Faith* authoriſing Infidelity in Form, and ſetting it upon the ſame Footing, in Point of Conſcience, with the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity itſelf.

I can never, I ſay, after all this expect any ſuch Solutions from you in Return in Behalf of your reaſoning Hypotheſis, as I am ſure you muſt, in your own Heart, have the juſteſt Contempt for: ſuch as Mens *thinking by Deputy the beſt they can*, when they are not qualified to think for themſelves; or, what has ſometimes been urged, the ingenious Contrivance of *abating a Degree of Evidence, to leave the more Room for the Merit* of Voluntiers, with the Duty of cultivating a pious Propenſity to the Affirmative, the ſoliciting the Aſſent of our own Minds, and endeavouring to *help our Unbelief*. To deſtroy at once all the Views for which all ſuch extraordinary Comments could ever be coined, I have inſiſted long ago, as a main Preclusion of all Notions of the examining Kind, that—It is evident Religion *knows no ſuch Situation as that of a Moment's Neutrality*;—that we have no Allowance to ſtand neuter in Religion, even ſo much as whilſt the Queſtion of its Truth is in Debate; which, in the Senſe of all good Chriſtians, ought *never to be made a Queſtion.*

And might not one now already from this ſhort negative View of the Caſe, almoſt venture

to

to take upon one to pronounce boldly, upon the Authority of one's own Reaſon, that ſuch a Scheme, as that of Unanimity upon this Subject, can be by no other poſſible Method to be effected, than that I have been contending for, of a *conſtant and particular Revelation imparted ſeparately and ſupernaturally to every Individual?* And how much more abſolutely ſatisfactory then muſt it be to a *Chriſtian Seeker*, if upon our ſearching into his own Scripture Account of the Matter, there appears, to be indeed *this very Method* which we might ſo naturally expect, there exactly deſcribed, and ſet forth to us for the Purpoſe?

If all that I have hitherto been urging may have had the wiſh'd Effect to remove only the contracted Incumbrance of this one fatal and fundamental Prejudice,—*That it is by Reaſoning that you are to come to the Knowledge of all neceſſary Truths*; my only remaining Part is to offer up my moſt ardent Prayers in your Behalf at the Throne of Grace, *not for Leiſure* for you to conſult, *or Sagacity* to apprehend all the acute Leſſons of a *Hammond* or *Grotius* upon the Subject, but that God would be pleaſed *himſelf to illuminate* and irradiate your Mind with a perfect and thorough Conviction of the Truth of his holy Goſpel; that the ſame holy Spirit that firſt dictated that divine Law, would powerfully ſet to his Seal, and atteſt its Authority in your Heart, that he would be graciouſly vouchſafed to renew once more his diſregarded Notices, and eſtabliſh in you an uncontrovertible Knowledge of its ſtrict Veracity, ſuch a one as that, with the enlighten'd Apoſtle, you may at once *believe, and be ſure that Jeſus was the Chriſt.* Such a full and home felt Perſuaſion, as will render ſuperfluous all your farther Care and purpoſed

Labour

Labour in the Search, by fixing you *in the happy Inſtant* a true, a zealous, and unalterable Diſciple of Chriſtianity.

Indeed, the ſitting down to examine into the Truth of Religion at this Time of Day, cannot but appear to my Senſe a very ſtrange Kind of Language from one in your Situation. From a Native of *California* or the *Cape*, there might perhaps be nothing ſo extraordinary or unbecoming to hear of ſuch a Propoſal. But you diſclaim, it ſeems, in your Philoſophical Sufficiency, all the partial Advantages of Birth and Education (though many would eſteem themſelves not a little favour'd in the Diſtinction: But the Notion of *Local Merit*, as you expreſs yourſelf, the being *born to particular Privileges*, and *beholden to Accident*, as you call it, *for true Opinions*, are Circumſtances your rational Spirit can by no means digeſt, which is as much as to ſay, "that you are reſolved to reap no Benefit from the Covenant of "Grace, except you are to have the preſcribing "the Means yourſelf, and that you will be con-"tent to accept of Salvation only upon your own "Terms, and in your own Way." For tell me, you that are ſo induſtriouſly looking out for the Proofs of Chriſtianity, are you not then the while a Chriſtian? Are you not at this Inſtant a baptized and covenanted Chriſtian? And is not this being indeed a Chriſtian to all Intents and Purpoſes already, and in the Way that God himſelf has preſcribed us? To what Purpoſe then all this mighty Buſtle and Parade for holding of this ſolemn Trial upon the Occaſion, and all for the Sake of repeating only at the beſt a Deciſion you have long ſince given in the Cauſe? *Curioſitate non opus eſt poſt Chriſtum, nec inquiſitione poſt evangelium, quum credimus nihil deſideramus ultra cre-*

dere, says *Tertullian*. Or, to make Use of a still greater Authority,—*Make not thyself otherwise, why shouldst thou destroy thyself?* Why, indeed, should you affect, in Vanity of Heart, to be more a Christian than any of your honest Neighbours, or be solicitous for a different Method in your Religion from that of other People? For Heaven's Sake, are there then, in your Opinion, two Kinds of Christianity, one for the vulgar and illiterate, and another adapted to Disciples of a more refined Genius, and exalted Speculations? Does not plainly, as I observed above, *the Infant*'s Belief answer as effectually all the Demands of the Gospel, as that of the first Proficient and highest *Graduate in Divinity?* And is it not accepted (if not preferred) as at least an *equal* Claim to all its Rewards with that of the best of them? And what would your proud Reason more? Be content then, in God's Name, to be e'en as good a Christian only as *your Sister*, whom you cannot doubt to be equally entitled to all the Means of Grace and Hopes of Glory with the *proudest Philosopher*, who is even *wiser than the Aged*, because a meek and humble Disciple of that true *Wisdom which cometh from above*. No, if we do but once heartily and truly believe, it is a very invidious, as well as superfluous Distinction to concern ourselves about, whether we know by the Test of our Understandings *upon what Grounds* we believe, or not. Be satisfied henceforth that there is *a Kind of Evidence* of Power beyond what Reason can ever pretend to furnish, such as brings with it that cordial Peace and Assurance of Mind to which all *Conviction by human Means* is an utter Stranger, such as you see can enable your pious Mother without any of the reputed Advantages of academic Institution to pronounce with so much peremptory

ry Juſtice on all religious Cauſes, and reprove, with ſo good a Grace, all the well-gloſſed Hereſies of a letter'd *Clarke*.

To come ſtill cloſer, if poſſible, to the Point, and ſpeak home, once for all, to this unaccountable Project; it is a Practice of common Prudence, generally obſerved in our worldly Affairs, to aſk ourſelves beforehand, upon any Undertaking of Moment,—What Probability of Succeſs? and what new Advantages in Proſpect to ariſe to us, when we have ſucceeded? Now, according to this Rule, it ſhould, one would imagine, be Conſideration ſufficient to deter your engaging in your preſent Enterprize, that in the firſt Place this Reaſon will, in all Probability, never have the Effect propoſed of confirming our Faith; and, in the next Place, will be ſuperfluous if it has; and that you are at preſent as well without it. For taking it, I ſay, at the beſt, and ſuppoſing that you ſhould now ſucceed to your Wiſh in this Attempt, what is the mighty Advantage after all, that you can farther propoſe, from a Conviction of this Kind in all its imagin'd Propriety? Nay, what if even this very Caution of mine againſt the Attempt ſhould chance at laſt to find you (as I can eaſily enough conceive it may) already actually convinced by Reaſon in Form of the Truth of all theſe Matters as they ſtand related to us? Will ſuch an Event enſured be any Matter of Triumph in general againſt my Argument, which has all along ſuppoſed ſuch a Conſequence to *ſuch an Enquirer* no impoſſible Thing? Or what Concluſion can you take upon you to draw from the Succeſs you have perſonally found in the Experiment? Can you aſſure yourſelf, from any Authority That has help'd you to, that you ſhall even for your own Part certainly continue

what you are for an Hour together? and, conſequently, can it give you any Foundation or Right to be recommending farther a like Trial elſewhere? Or, if you could indeed anſwer never ſo aſſuredly for your own Conſtancy, may not again, as I have ſo often reminded you, the ſame perſpicuous Proofs, that have determined you to pronounce ſo confidently for their Concluſiveneſs, poſſibly take a very different Turn in different Hands, affect your next Neighbour in a quite contrary Light, and leave him as confirmed an Infidel? The Effect you have happily experienced in your own Perſon, does not, however, make you by any Means the Standard, or give you any Right to expect that other People ſhould concur in making juſt the ſame Judgments of Things which you have done; the Reaſon of your Diſciple will, in all Probability, prove a very different Scale from that you have been working with, and though *you*, by the particular Advantages of your Turn and Education, may be indeed able to do that Juſtice to the Merits of the Cauſe, as to trace in them all this cogent Force to the Amount of a Demonſtration; of what Significance and Weight can you expect all this to prove towards the affecting of Minds altogether unverſed in the Practice of drawing Inferences and Deductions, and which muſt therefore neceſſarily continue all the while in the Dark, even amidſt all thoſe glaring Lights which your diſcerning Sight can diſcover round them? It is not therefore by any Means my being convinced myſelf, no, nor even the moſt abſolute Perſpicuity I may diſcover in the Argument, that can authoriſe my promiſing the like Succeſs to another in his ſpeculative Eſſays; and therefore Men ſhould be very cautious of being inſtrumental in the tempting any into

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ſceptical Controverſies, unleſs they could be certain enough beforehand of their *Judges*, *as well as their Cauſe*, to enable them to promiſe peremptorily for a ſatisfactory Iſſue, there being, as I have before remarked, no Proviſion made, either by God or Man, for ſincere Infidelity as a poſſible Conſequence of a fair Enquiry into the Merits of Religion. *He that believeth not, ſhall be damned.* No Exceptions or Allowances whatſoever for any profeſſing to have uſed all poſſible Means of Information, and remaining ſtill diſſatisfied.

But, once more, what if after all (which may likewiſe poſſibly happen to be the Caſe) the powerful Evidence on the Side of Religion ſhould indeed fail in its Influence, and not appear ſatisfactory enough to you to enforce the Profeſſion of it? What if, on the other hand, the ſpecious Gloſſes of Infidelity ſhould poſſibly happen to obtain at laſt even in your own Opinion upon this Scrutiny; if the plauſible Pretexts of ingenious Sophiſtry ſhould prove ſo far of Force in the Queſtion, as unhappily to miſguide your Reaſon by their artful Repreſentations of the Cauſe of Errar? Why "the Sincerity of your Intention, *you* "*ſay*, will acquit you, becauſe you have done "your beſt: Your juſt Judge, *you ſay*, can "never expect of you to do more than is in your "Power, or to be convinced ſooner. *Which is as much as to ſay*, "that you will either do what "God commands you, or take Care to come "prepared to juſtify your Refuſal to his Satisfac"tion;" never obſerving the while that all your Reaſonings of this Stamp are grounded upon the monſtrous Suppoſition that God would enjoin a Thing that you ſhould be able to give ſolid and ſubſtantial Reaſons for not complying with. Strangeſt

geſt Deluſion ſure! to go directly oppoſite to your Maker's expreſs Command, and yet flatter yourſelf with Hopes of being provided with a ſufficient Excuſe for your Diſobedience. *Behold to obey is better than Sacrifice*, and to comply than to be making Apologies.

I ſhall now releaſe you from all farther Attendance, with the moſt cordial Admonition of one who has indeed *a Father*'s Concern and Intereſt in all your Succeſs. Its Meaning at leaſt I think you muſt allow, whatever Exceptions you may poſſibly find to its Authority. *My Son, truſt thou in the Lord with all thy Heart, and lean not unto thine own Underſtanding.*

F I N I S.